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# THE MYSTERY
## ...OF...
# PAUL CHADWICK

BY

JOHN W. POSTGATE

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# THE MYSTERY
# OF
# PAUL CHADWICK

A BACHELOR'S STORY

BY

JOHN W. POSTGATE

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CHICAGO:

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# CHAPTER I.

## A WOMAN'S LUSTROUS EYES.

Raking among the ashes of the dead past is a task I dislike. I have no desire to stir up bitter memories or renew old feuds. Still less do I wish to revive a scandal that left ugly scars on several innocent hearts. Only a stern sense of duty could impel me to the course I have resolved upon. I feel that the time has come when the truth about the tragedy and its strange sequence should be made known.

There is no longer any valid reason for concealment. Paul Chadwick rests quietly in his grave despite the slanders raised to vex his ghost. It is to clear his name from vile and baseless charges, to ease the last days of his aged parents, who have been ever loyal to their son, that I now essay this grewsome mission.

Perhaps I shall reopen wounds long since closed or send pangs through long dormant hearts, but that is a penalty beyond my power to avert. Whether sinned against or sinning we cannot dull the thorns that in our bosoms lodge to prick and sting. The barbed shafts of grief are

often more fatal to the innocent than the shock of crime to the wicked. That is one of the cruel conditions of life absolutely beyond mortal control.

But a deep wrong was inflicted upon Paul Chadwick and the dark curtain of the past must now be raised. Justice shall be done his memory no matter whose withers are wrung. * * *

Until his marriage the world went very well with Paul Chadwick. In every respect he was a prosperous gentleman. Mustered out of his regiment with a brilliant record at the close of the war, he settled down to civil life as a lawyer and soon won distinction at the Chicago bar. As the years passed honors crowded upon him. An eloquent and polished speaker, his services were in demand in every political campaign, and he was several times rewarded with offices of emolument and trust. His voice was potential in party councils, his influence extending from Illinois to Washington, where he was often a welcome guest at the White House. Many men who now pose as statesmen owe their political fortunes to Paul Chadwick, who in the heyday of his prosperity took more pleasure in forwarding the interests of his friends than in pressing his own rights in the line of preferment.

But apart from the game of politics, which he played with much tact and skill, Chadwick was in great request. In society, which always has a warm welcome for the successful man, he was a decided favorite. An unfettered bachelor, with a lucrative law practice and growing influence in public affairs, he was the object of much solicitude

on the part of eager mothers with marriageable daughters on their hands. Then he was especially fitted to shine in the social circle. He was tall and slender, with a fine intellectual face and easy, inviting manners. There was a dashing confidence in his bearing that had a peculiar charm for susceptible spinsters. His conversation was grave and gay by turns and spiced with flashes of fancy that showed the quick and cultivated mind. As an entertainer he never was at a loss for a good story or a ready flow of acceptable small talk. At picnics, routs or balls none bore off the honors so easily as Paul Chadwick.

In other walks of life he was equally popular. He was one of the first of Chicago's prominent citizens to take a sympathetic interest in the cause of labor. The leaders, as well as the rank and file of the great industrial army, had the utmost confidence in his ability as a lawyer and trustworthiness as a man. He fought many a legal battle for them and enforced respect for their rights. He held himself at their service at all times, and in many instances refused compensation for work in their behalf. And his was not an assumed generosity. He did not espouse the cause of the workingman from political motives—a trick that is common enough in these self-seeking times—but out of pure and heartfelt sympathy for the toilers of the land. For distress of all kinds he felt keenly, and his purse and brain were prompt to respond to every legitimate call on their resources.

This was ten years ago, be it remembered, when Paul Chadwick was uniformly regarded as a talented and trust-

worthy citizen. This regard did not abate until fully a week after his death. The first shock of the tragedy brought many encomiums to the lips of leading men. "The soul of honor," testified one; "honest and fearless," said another; "a true man and Christian gentleman," "generous to a fault," "a hater of hypocrisy and shams," "chivalrous and beyond reproach," "his failings leaned to virtue's side," etc.

Such were the phrases in all men's mouths, as I have said, for fully a week after the news of his awful end was flashed over the wires. Then came a strange revulsion, ending in almost universal condemnation and scorn. And a woman's wicked tongue brought about the change.

Why did he marry? I have asked myself this question over and over again without being able to calm the angry thoughts it arouses. It is a question that troubles many a household in this fair land. "Why did I marry?" sprang to Othello's lips when Iago's poison first infected his brain. "Why did I marry?" echoes and re-echoes through countless hearts in every civilized quarter of the globe.

From the very first intimation of his desire to forego the privileges of bachelorhood I had a premonition of evil. There seemed to be no excuse for his taking that fatal step. He had passed 40; he was gaining wealth, and, with all his social advantages, he could not put in a plea of loneliness. While I was a trifle older and, with the exception of an occasional plunge into society, had nothing but my club and his friendship to reconcile me to life, yet I managed to smother all latent longings for connubial joys.

It always seemed to me that a man over 40 should renounce vain imaginings of that sort and round out his days peacefully in the holy twilight of single blessedness.

But Chadwick was sentimental and romantic despite his forty-odd years and his legal training and daily contact with my hard, practical nature. It was perhaps surprising, when you consider the many temptations that scheming mothers and artful widows threw in his path, that he had kept single so long. Still it seemed doubly unfortunate that when he was caught in the cruel trap he should cast all discretion to the winds and yield to the common wiles of a pretty face, a soft, wheedling tongue, and a pair of lustrous eyes.

I am free to admit that Helen Barton was a brilliant and fascinating woman, that her physical charms were such as few men could resist. She was above the medium height, of graceful, willowy form, dark complexion and good features. Her mouth, whether in repose or rippling with smiles, was a constant temptation, and the play of the merry dimples in her peach-like cheeks was delightfully impressive. But neither pleasant smiles nor the pearly teeth they revealed, nor the cunning, laughing dimples of her cheeks compared in seductive power to her large, wistful, hungering brown eyes.

There was something about those eyes that held men as by a spell. They were wondrous, puzzling, dazzling orbs, with unfathomable motives and cues for passion in their liquid depths.

To me, however, their glances, whether mild or piercing,

melting or maddening, were not reassuring. I could not understand their incessant play. I fancied deceit and treachery where others saw nothing but childlike innocence and truth. But what mattered my views about Mrs. Barton's eyes? They neither beamed, nor dreamed, nor flashed, nor sparkled for me. My opinion as to their glory or their power was never asked.

Chadwick told me the sudden effect of the woman's beauty upon himself. We were then boarding together at Mme. Dupierre's on Michigan avenue, and it was his custom to come into my sitting-room after dinner for a smoke and a quiet chat. This evening he was flushed and somewhat excited and on my remarking the fact he said with characteristic frankness:

"I am not altogether myself to-night, Robert. I am afraid a crisis has arrived in my life."

I looked at him in surprise, and he continued with a pleasant laugh:

"Oh, there's no peril or danger, as you seem to anticipate. The fact is I believe I have met my fate."

He paused and I awaited further information in silence. A strange uneasiness had seized me. While Paul was evidently disposed to be jocular his voice had an earnest ring and his bright eyes were full of enthusiasm. But I was peculiarly affected, as I have said. We were old, old friends, and as he spoke lightly of a crisis the feeling crept over me that something was about to happen to interrupt our pleasant relations.

"You look gloomily curious, Robert; why don't you

put your thoughts into words?" resumed Paul.

"Nay," said I, trying to shake off the feeling of depression. "It is for you to enlighten me. 'Fate' and 'crisis' are strong words and need an explanation. What is their import in this case?"

"Cautious as usual, old man," was the reply. "Why, to be plain with you, I think I have met the woman I must marry."

"The deuce," exclaimed I, dropping my pipe in alarm.

"No, not exactly," making a ready play on my remark. "Not the deuce, but a very handsome and winsome young lady, Robert. Let me tell you how it happened. I've got to talk, or my thoughts will set me wild. Last night, you know, I gave a lecture on 'Byron as a Man and a Poet' at Apollo Hall. In one of the front seats was a young lady with large lustrous eyes which seemed to drink in the very spirit of my discourse. The play of her features inspired me to an extra effort. I was never in better mood, and I carried the audience in full sympathy with me through the varying paths of Byron's mad and melancholy career. At the close I found myself wishing for an introduction to that one fair listener. But she had disappeared, and I felt sadly disappointed. Her face, with its big wistful brown eyes, haunted me all night. I tried to put it out of mind, but even in my dreams it was present, sometimes as a guardian spirit, sometimes as an avenging angel, but always closely associated with me. In fact, the thought held me in my sleep that she was to be the companion of my life. Curious, wasn't it?"

"How old are you, Chadwick?" inquired I, as he stopped and seemed disposed to sink into a dreamy reverie.

"Forty-four last birthday," was the mechanical answer.

"Forty-four! Past the age of romance; at the time when the blood is cool and passion is supposed to wait upon judgment. And yet here you are talking like a love-sick schoolboy. What the deuce do you want with wistful, lustrous eyes and the play of sympathetic features? Better leave that nonsense to beardless youths and simpering lasses, and keep on setting up the pegs for the Congressional nomination."

This badinage did not suit Chadwick. A flash of annoyance was apparent as he said hurriedly:

"Of course, I don't expect you to follow me in such an affair. You are too old for any remnant of passion to cling to you. It's different with me. I have watched and waited all my life for just such a face. It has come at last, as I knew it would. Let the Congressional nomination go hang!"

"But this is the very ecstasy of madness," cried I, now thoroughly alarmed by his condition. "Are you going to throw away the political chance of your life to nurse the memory of a pretty face? Why, man——"

"Don't be too hasty," he broke in with a return to his old manner. "It is not merely a memory; I know the owner of the face now."

"You have met her then since the lecture?"

"Yes."

"Ah!"

"Oh! you needn't look so black or sigh so heavily. It is my fate, not yours."

"Thank goodness!"

I could not help this ejaculation. Chadwick had twitted me with my age and insensibility, and no man the right side of 60 can stand that. But I was sorry the moment it had left my lips. His face grew sterner than I remembered it for years. He seemed to struggle with himself as he said:

"Robert, no more levity. This is a serious business with me. Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it, but I had to talk to somebody, and I preferred you for my confidant."

"But it is all so strange and sudden," said I, glad that there had been no worse outbreak. "I did not realize you were in earnest at first."

"You are right," in more mollified tones; "it is sudden, and it is none the less strange to me, but I am very much in earnest. Our acquaintance has a curious beginning. It is fate beyond a doubt."

He smoked on in silence a few moments, and then resumed:

"On returning from luncheon to-day I found my fair auditor waiting to consult me. You can judge of my surprise. She had been in my thoughts all morning, but I never expected to see her in my office as a client. Something in my manner must have expressed this surprise, since she apologized prettily, saying that she had been deeply interested in my portrayal of the poet's trials and

troubles, and thought I would be the very man to aid and assist her professionally in her plight. I assured her that I was at her service and asked her to state the case. She hesitated a few moments, and then said: 'Colonel, I want you to bring proceedings for a divorce.' I could scarce believe my ears. Not for a moment had I imagined that this lovely woman, who had engrossed my mind from the very moment I saw her rapt and attentive the previous night, was married. The fact sent a chill over my frame. It was with great difficulty I pulled myself together and stammered that I was sorry, but I did not practice in the divorce courts. She was not prepared for this answer. Her eyes filled with tears as she begged my pardon and said how sorry she was to learn that. 'Since last night, Colonel,' she added, 'I had built up my hopes on your assistance. I thought you would not only sympathize with my case, but would free me from a bondage that is galling and detestable. Do you never undertake a divorce case?' I could not resist the piteous appeal in those splendid eyes. I said there might be circumstances under which I could assume the direction of her affairs, and very soon the whole of her sad story was poured into my ears. She has been a much-abused woman, old man, and my heart went out toward her in spite of myself. I have taken her case, and she has taken me absolutely and completely. As soon as she is free I shall make her my wife. I suppose I ought to add that she is not in good circumstances. She works as a milliner in one of the large stores."

While this was not very explicit, it was, to say the least,

startling. It passed my comprehension that a hard-headed lawyer like Chadwick should become so suddenly enmeshed in the snares of love. It was also bewildering to my old-fogy intellect that the heroine of such a catastrophe should be a married woman seeking a divorce. I knew it was dangerous to tamper in any way with affairs of the heart, but for the life of me I could not refrain from throwing out a hint that I thought my friend was making a fool of himself.

"All this is deeply interesting," said I slowly, "but, Chadwick, aren't you just a trifle precipitate? Granting that you have met your fate in Mrs.——, Mrs.——"

"Barton," he interjected quietly.

"Granting that you have met your fate in Mrs. Barton, how do you know that she will wed you after obtaining a divorce? You surely have not already proposed?"

"Certainly not," was his quick response. "I could not so insult her. But we are destined for one another, I am sure. I feel it here, old fellow" (pressing a hand to his bosom theatrically). "My heart tells me she is my fate."

As he uttered these words a happy glow overspread Chadwick's face. I saw that further expostulation was useless. The man was over head and ears in love and consequently beyond the reach of reason. But I ventured another suggestion.

"You expect to marry Mrs. Barton, Chadwick?"

"Yes, as sure as fate."

"Then, pardon me if I suggest that it would look much better if she employed another lawyer in the divorce proceedings."

I thought he was going to get angry. His brows pursed together for a moment, but he reached over his hand to me and acquiesced:

"You are right, Robert. It will look better. I shall so advise her to-morrow."

## CHAPTER II.

### SHARES THE "LITTLE SECRET."

I need not dwell upon the feelings this revelation aroused. One does not like to see a lifelong friend drift helplessly toward the rocks and shoals of matrimony. The unhappy climax means a severance of ties that have become almost sacred, a disruption of habits that must have a fatal result on one or the other of the friends.

But while I was profoundly sorry both for Chadwick's sake and my own, I cherished no resentment toward the woman. I did not know her then.

The dreaded change came over Paul sooner than I expected. Within a week our relations were completely altered. He no longer sought my company after dinner. His evenings were spent away from the boarding-house. There was metal more attractive elsewhere.

Under the circumstances this was natural and proper, but I fretted over the check to our comradeship. Moreover, after mentally reviewing the situation, I had an uneasy, harrowing notion that Mrs. Barton had contrived the meeting with Chadwick for no good purpose. It was with the utmost difficulty I refrained from voicing this suspicion. A dozen times a day I rehearsed a little speech designed to put Paul on his guard, and a dozen times

more I forced myself to understand that I had no right to interfere in the love affair of my friend.

Mme. Dupierre noticed that there was something wrong with me. Unlike some fashionable boarding-house keepers she was very jealous of the comfort of her guests. Any sign of discontent she attributed to defects in her cuisine, and she was continually seeking suggestions to help maintain or improve its reputation. Chadwick and I had boarded with her for several years, and she had always evinced a lively solicitude in regard to our welfare.

I was not surprised, therefore, when she came into my sitting-room one evening and asked after the state of my health.

"Pardon me, Mr. Mortimer," she said in her quaint French fashion, "but you no longer eat with the good humor. I tell the cook make pains for the beefsteak or the cutlet and just brown the toast a very, very little. I watch the dinner myself, but Mr. Mortimer he has not the appetite. He tastes a little and then look sour. He try sometite. He taste a little and then look sour. The stomach not satisfied, the man get ill. I am very much grieved. I do not like to see the poor appetite. I say, how can I help the poor man, and I have come to listen to what is the malady."

I assured the good lady that there was nothing seriously the matter with me; that perhaps my mind was a trifle preoccupied, and I was thinking of something else when I ought to be eating.

"Ah! yes, Mr. Mortimer," she protested, "but the health

will not keep when the dinner it is neglected, and it makes me what you call sad when I see the soup and the fish and the roast come away from the table without the satisfaction. And then you no longer keep the company in your room. You shut your door and make no noise, no laugh, no what you call jolly time when the Colonel Chadwick comes here. Only smoke, smoke, smoke the big pipe and the black cigar. Ah! no! Mr. Mortimer, I cannot be deceived. If it is not the stomach, the appetite, it is the heart. Mr. Mortimer, you must be getting once more young. The trouble must be here" (placing her hand on her bosom). "I must believe that it is love."

I laughed outright at this diagnosis. Robert Mortimer in love! It seemed inexpressibly funny as the good-natured French woman rolled her eyes in opera-bouffe fashion and told me that I was caught in Cupid's trap.

Mme. Dupierre was rather hurt by the manner in which I had received her conjecture. She was short and stout, but had an expressive, vivacious face, and, although on the shady side of forty, I had sometimes thought the tender passion was only dormant in her own ample bosom. She had a soft, sentimental manner that was very ingratiating and consoling in sickness, and the deftness with which she administered possets and smoothed the bed-covering was restful if not healing. Chadwick joked me occasionally about her motherly concern over my physical welfare, and as I saw that my laughter had grieved the little woman the thought that he might have hit upon truth in jest somewhat upset my composure.

What if Mme. Dupierre had a soft corner in her heart for me? I never professed to be a woman hater, even if I did consider myself proof against feminine wiles. But neither, as I have stated, did I hanker after the restraints and discomforts of matrimony. I loved my pipe and my freedom. I liked to spend a night at the club. I was fond of a good song and a glass. My tastes, habits and customs were peculiarly masculine, and I had never yet seen the woman who could make my pulse go a single beat faster or send one extra pang through my adamantine breast.

But as soon as this thought entered my mind I confess I trembled in apprehension.

Chadwick's sudden surrender made me suspicious of myself. Can it be that a man grows weaker as he grows older? Does he become more susceptible to woman's wiles? Was it possible that Mme. Dupierre, whom I had always regarded as a second mother, had designs upon my bachelorhood?

Cold chills crept down my spine and I broke out into a heavy perspiration as I glanced again at the attractive little Frenchwoman, who was watching me, as I imagined, with eager, devouring eyes. She was the first to speak.

"I do not like that laugh," she said reproachfully, "and why? It is of the brain excitement. Mr. Mortimer was not always so jocular. He was of the serious, the melancholy mood, which suit him very much better. Ah?"

I cannot recall hearing such another sigh. It was long and loud, broad and deep, like the expiring gasp of an

autumn gale. Then it was accompanied by such an odd grimace that I lapsed at once into a nervous panic. There seemed little doubt in my excitable condition that Mme. Dupierre was throwing her cap plump into my face.

"My dear madam," I managed to stammer, after a heroic effort to control myself, "nothing was further from my thoughts than a desire to make light of your interest in my welfare. I assure you I appreciate it at its true value. But when you spoke of love——"

"Oh! Mr. Mortimer," she interrupted with another peculiar roll of her eyes, "you make of me——"

I thought she was bound to distort the situation to her own advantage and my undoing, and I did not permit her to finish the sentence. In my agitation I threw discretion and everything else to the winds.

"Yes, yes," I cried. "It is an affair of the heart that bothers me. But it is not my heart, Mme. Dupierre. It is the heart of my friend."

"Oh!" she gasped, "you speak of the Colonel Chadwick?"

"Yes, yes," I hurriedly assented, "Colonel Chadwick has lost his heart, not I; he is in love!"

"Ah! the poor, the happy man!" exclaimed Mme. Dupierre, looking almost as delighted as though she were personally concerned in the affair. She had risen nervously when my words seemed to augur a tender avowal. Now she resumed her seat with an air of rapt expectancy.

"And pray, Mr. Mortimer, who is the happy, happy woman?" she asked.

I was nettled at having blurted out the news to extricate myself from a delicate situation. I had no right to divulge Chadwick's folly. He had not enjoined secrecy, but the unwriten law of friendship precludes tattle of this kind. In my own selfish haste to avoid a similar scrape, or what I believed was leading up to one, I had in a measure betrayed the confidence of my friend. The feeling such knowledge inspires is not at all agreeable, and I cast rapidly about for some means of mending matters.

Unluckily, I am not ready of invention. The only way that came to my mind was to ask Mme. Dupierre to regard my revelation as a profound secret.

This was a terrible blunder for a bachelor to make. As soon as the request was preferred I realized my folly. I had practically put myself at the mercy of this impressionable Frenchwoman.

"A secret!" she cried gleefully. "Ah! yes, that is fine, that is very, very beautiful. I shall keep him Mr. Mortimer, keep him all by himself. If there is anything I do love, it is one grand secret. I am your devoted servant, Mr. Mortimer. And the lady, may I ask? She must be very rich, very grand, very beautiful for the Colonel Chadwick. You will tell me, will you not, my dear Mr. Mortimer?"

What else could I do, confound it? I groaned inwardly as I told as much as I dared. During the recital the little Frenchwoman rolled her eyes at the ceiling and murmured at intervals:

"Ah, mon Dieu! How lovely, how very, very beautiful!"

But when I hinted that I was not satisfied with my friend's choice, Mme. Dupierre permitted a shade of annoyance to pass over her face, and she said significantly:

"It is the jealousy, sir. You must not permit him to interrupt the happiness of your dear, dear friend. The loneliness will pass, Mr. Mortimer. Perhaps some other lady with beautiful eyes shall make love to you."

Her tones and gestures startled me again. There was not the least doubt that she was making eyes at me. I wanted to let her see that I was indifferent alike to amorous glances and pointed innuendo.

"Perhaps so, Mme. Dupierre," I said with a forced laugh, "but she will not be a divorcee. If I am to fall a victim to Cupid's pranks I hope I shall have sense enough left to be discreet in my misfortune."

"Misfortune," echoed the little woman amazedly, and then quickly changing to a mood of smiling sympathy, she added: "Ah, yes, it is the misfortune to love the divorced woman, but the widow, the pleasant, the comfortable widow—that is very, very different, is it not, Mr. Mortimer?"

It seemed impossible to keep the woman off dangerous ground. My face flushed as she made this significant remark. That she noticed it was evident from a fleeting glimmer of triumph in her eyes. It was time to end the interview. I rose with some trepidation and said as steadily as I could:

"Of course, this is all in the strictest confidence, Mme. Dupierre. Not a word to a soul, you know."

"I understand, Mr. Mortimer," she responded as she rose and shook out her flounces prior to departure. "It is our little secret. We will watch the drama together. We will look on the sighing and the billing and the cooing of the turtle doves. We will sympathize with the music which makes in their hearts, and we will smile and be gay when the wedding bells go ding-dong merrily in the happy sunshine. Ah, the grande passion! I am so glad, Mr. Mortimer, it was not the stomach. Bon soir, monsieur! We will keep the little secret. Ah, the grande passion!"

And the landlady dropped a graceful courtesy, vanished from the room and left me in a very uncomfortable state of mind.

## CHAPTER III.

### CHADWICK COUNSELS SURRENDER.

I soon had cause to regret my conversation with Mme. Dupierre. The "little secret" was too much of a burden for her. She assumed a mysterious, sympathetic air toward Chadwick and myself that piqued the curiosity of the lady boarders. Two or three times I thought she was on the verge of a compromising disclosure, and when she nodded in response to my telegraphic warning, she simply heightened the prevailing spirit of inquisitiveness. Then she got into the habit of dropping into my room and talking sentimentally about Chadwick's love affair. I repeatedly cautioned her to preserve strict secrecy. She protested again and again in her quaint style that she had not the remotest wish to break faith; it was too sweet, too beautiful, to share with anybody else. And in my masculine innocence I trusted her.

Very soon the nimble tongue of gossip began its perilous play. There were whispers of love and weddings. Whenever two or more of the ladies got together you could hear sibilant sounds and see curious gestures. For some time I could not divine the meaning of sundry nods and smiles that passed around the dining-room when the landlady was more than usually fussy at our table. Accident furnished a key that both astounded and alarmed me.

One morning I was rather late in leaving for business. As I opened my door I heard female voices on the stairs. Now, I have a superstition that it is unlucky if not dangerous to pass a lady while going downstairs, and I retreated in haste, leaving my door slightly ajar. I had no intention to listen to the conversation—no self-respecting bachelor would be guilty of eavesdropping, especially when two ladies may be exchanging tender confidences. But my name was mentioned in rather an odd way and curiosity caused me to trifle with my conscience.

"And do you think Mr. Mortimer is very much in love?" one of the voices said.

"There cannot be any doubt about it," was the emphatic response of the other scandal-monger. "Why, he cannot keep his eyes off her. And, then, you may notice that he does not encourage the visits of his friend, the Colonel, any more. He prefers to be alone, so that the lovemaking may be smooth and uninterrupted."

"Well, in some ways it will be a good thing for her. I understand he is pretty well off, and she might do worse. He is not bad looking, and she may be able to convert him into quite a family man. But, for my part, I couldn't stand his everlasting smoking, and they do say he has a temper when things don't go on right."

"Oh, you trust the madam to mend all that."

And the fair gossips laughed as though their sides would split. To say that I was excited by this talk but feebly expresses my condition. I was hot through and through. It was all I could do to keep myself from bounc-

ing on those infernal tattlers and telling them to hold their mischief-making tongues. Here I had been exercising all my wits to evade a tangle with that emotional, romantic Frenchwoman, and yet my efforts had been misconstrued as plain, everyday, vulgar lovemaking. The cares and dangers of bachelorhood were never so heavy upon me as at that moment. I could see how a man might be forced into matrimony against his will. Be he never so circumspect or careful, if a woman fixes her eyes upon him in the way of ownership he is lost.

In its desperation my mind turned to Paul Chadwick for relief. I had to take counsel with someone regarding this serious situation, and who more suitable than my old friend? Besides, he was partly responsible for this embarrassment. If it had not been for his foolishness about Mrs. Barton there never would have been any reason for my confidential compact with Mme. Dupierre. She would have had no excuse to impose on my good nature. I should have had no tender secret to share with her, and the even tenor of my life would have been undisturbed by the vicious tongues of boarding-house gossips. In my excited frame of mind I now considered Mrs. Barton the evil genius of both Paul Chadwick and myself.

Mme. Dupierre was in the hall, according to her late habit, to waft me "au revoir" as I went out. Angry though I was I had to silently acknowledge that, while plump to a fault, she was withal a fair and pleasant personage. Under other circumstances this fact might have extorted a compliment from my unwilling lips. I grunted some-

thing in reply, and had the grim satisfaction of seeing her face cloud up and feeling that I had given her material for a bad quarter of an hour.

I went direct to Chadwick's office. He was alone and immersed in law books and seemed surprised to see me. I suppose I looked glum, for his greeting was:

"Hello! Mortimer; what kind of trouble are you in?"

I never was good at beating about the bush, so I plunged at once into the irritating subject. After I had told him with more or less heat that current gossip associated my name with that of Mme. Dupierre in prospective marriage, he said in a tantalizing manner:

"What's the use of making a fuss over it? Mme. Dupierre is an estimable woman, and you might do worse."

"Might do worse!" cried I. "Why, I haven't the slightest intention of trying to do better."

"Then, it is as good as settled. When will the happy event occur?"

"Hang it, man," was my hot response. "What's the use of you trying to misunderstand me? I'm not thinking of marriage. I'm in no way attached to Mme. Dupierre. The whole thing is a foolish invention of those stupid gossips."

"If that's the way you look at it," Chadwick said gravely, "I'm afraid the end is not yet."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I've heard it said on authority that would be accepted by any court that you have seriously compromised yourself with the French widow."

"Good God, Chadwick," I exclaimed in alarm, "what infernal nonsense is this?"

"It is not nonsense, Robert," was the solemn answer. "Unless you marry the woman she has a good case for damages."

I could scarcely believe my senses. Nothing in my intercourse with the landlady could be construed into courtship. I had always been cautious in her presence. I had studiously repressed any attempt at familiarity on her part. Yet there sat Chadwick with solemn face declaring in express terms that unless I married Mme. Dupierre she could sue me for breach of promise.

What did it all mean? I went to Paul for advice and comfort and was plunged into another terrible dilemma. Had he been imposed upon by some designing person, or was he possessed of traits and happenings in my own career of which I myself was totally ignorant?

"See here, Paul," I began again, after trying in vain to account for this strange reception, "you seem to be in earnest, but I do not in the least comprehend what you have been talking about. There are no compromising relations between Mme. Dupierre and myself. I have never made love to her. I have never permitted her to make love to me. I have no intention of proposing to her, and consequently all talk of marriage or breach of promise suits is absurd."

"Will you answer me a question or two, Mortimer?" was his quiet response.

"Certainly, a thousand if you like."

"Has not Mme. Dupierre been in your room a great deal of late?"

"She has."

"And the cause of her visits was—what?"

"Well," (and here I hesitated, for I could not reveal to him the full course of our conversation) "in the first place, she thought my appetite was failing and she was anxious to find out the cause."

"And you told her?"

"Yes; I said that I was in my usual health."

"Was that all?"

"No—not exactly, but there was nothing really important in the rest."

"Are you sure?"

Now I could not tell him that we had discussed his private affairs, and I answered boldly:

"Yes."

"Come, Robert," he continued, smiling in rather an odd fashion. "Cudgel your brains a bit. Didn't you talk of love?"

Where could he have gotten his points? I thought it highly improbable that Mme. Dupierre would forget herself so far as to retail our confidential talk. Even though she had dropped hints of Chadwick's entanglement, I could not conceive her so imprudent as to tell what I had said on that delicate topic. Therefore, I again answered confidently:

"No."

"I see you are not disposed to trust me," remarked

Chadwick, "but I will give you another chance. Didn't you tell Mme. Dupierre a secret of your heart? Didn't you talk of the grande passion, and didn't she have something to say about the delightful music of the wedding bells?"

"Why, there's witchcraft in this!" cried I in astonishment. "How the devil could——"

"Never mind that at present, my boy," said he laughing. "You see that I know your little secret. As I said before, Mme. Dupierre is a very fine woman, and you have no reason to be ashamed of your affection for her. Why you should come to me to-day to help you to deceive and desert her is inexplicable. You cannot have tired already of the widow's blandishments. What does it matter if some tattlers have got hold of the affair? You couldn't keep it quiet forever. And I think I ought to congratulate you, old fellow, on the wisdom of your choice. I noticed you did not seem pleased when I broached the subject of my matrimonial project. But I forgive you. It was simply the natural selfishness of human nature overpowering the ties of friendship. You couldn't bear anybody being as happy as yourself."

I had no power to stop this flow of mingled reproach and congratulation. I sat staring at Chadwick in amazement. To think that Mme. Dupierre had played me such a scurvy trick! To worm herself into my confidence and then distort the secret I imparted to her into a confession of love for herself. What manner of woman could she be to so abuse a sacred trust and turn it to her advantage.

Advantage! As I sat fuming and sweating in agony of disgust I registered an oath that no benefit should accrue to Mme. Dupierre that was in my power to prevent.

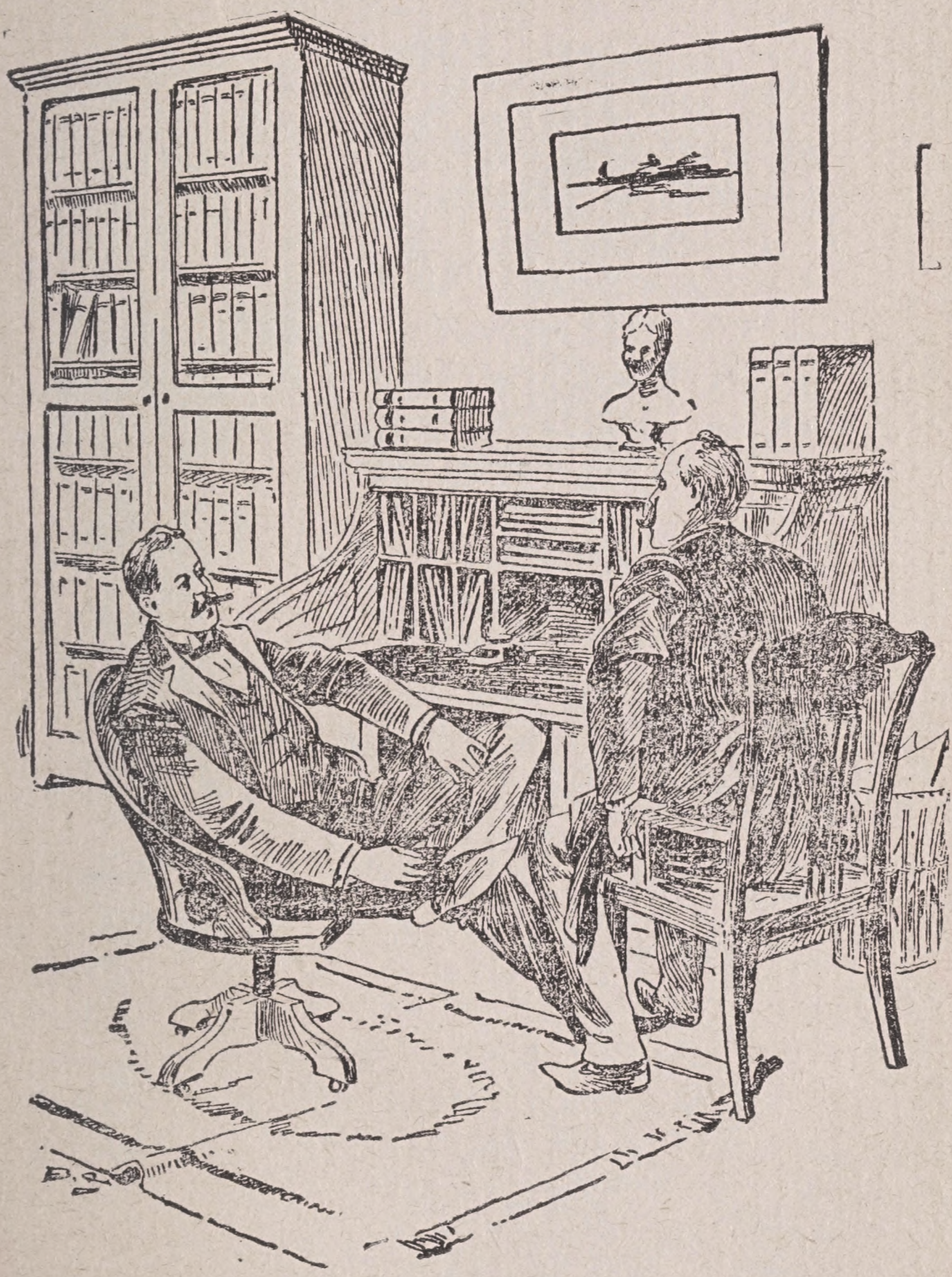
Moreover, I felt my anger rise against Chadwick. What right had he to spring this matter on me? His attitude was not only unfair, but unfriendly.

I forgot that I had opened the subject. As I grew cool —and it is surprising how cool one does get in the midst of imminent peril—I could not see where the slightest particle of blame attached to him. Perhaps he took the same view of my supposed case as I did of his actual entanglement. He undoubtedly thought he had no right to allow even friendship to intervene in affairs of love.

It seemed useless to interpose any further denial or to hazard any explanation. I was totally bewildered. My admissions of the tenor of that private interview rose up to plague both reason and conscience.

Were I to tell Chadwick the truth—to admit that I had taken Mme. Dupierre into my confidence concerning his own love affair, the chances were a hundred to one that he would not believe me. He would charge me with concocting the story to aid me in shuffling out of this entanglement with the cunning little Frenchwoman. Besides, he might argue, even if he did attach credence to my story, that I must be far gone in love myself to talk in such a strain to a woman who was notoriously angling for my affections.

As I rose to leave the office Chadwick took my hand and said, warmly: "Cheer up, old man, it won't be such a hard fate after all. If you can wait awhile we will have a double wedding."



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SWEET SECLUSION OF THE CLUB.

Business was out of the question for that day. Instead of going to my warehouse I made a bee line for the Fraternity Club on ——— street. A vague notion that I should find sanctuary there burned in my dazed brain. There at least I could think undisturbed. There, if the worst came to the worst, I could barricade myself and defy all the French widows in the United States. Neither sheriff nor constable could penetrate those sacred precincts if the sable Cerberus remained faithful to his trust. Never before had I appreciated the ease and comfort and safety of that select retreat as when I threw myself into a soft-cushioned chair in the smoking-room and called Cecil, the colored boy, to minister to my immediate needs.

At that hour the room was always deserted and I could think out my line of defense in absolute quiet. But, to my intense surprise, after puffing awhile at a cigar and dallying with a cooling drink, I found my brain shirking the problem it had to solve. Try as I might I could not fix my ideas on the widow's outrageous conduct or on a plan for circumventing her ambitious designs on my freedom. My thoughts ran entirely in other grooves. Whenever they partially rallied to contemplate for a moment the

great danger in my path something seemed to whisper:

"Don't worry, old boy. Send care to the deuce. She cannot marry you without your consent, and that, of course, is absolutely unattainable. Keep cool and complacent. No disturbing influence can cross you here, for an hour or two, at any rate."

I gave full sway to this internal comforter, and it was well I did so. The period of peaceful calm I enjoyed toned my nerves and gave me courage for another ordeal, which was then gathering round my unprotected head.

Even when inclined to take my ease at the club I am methodical in my preparations. Before I summoned Cecil to my aid I had telephoned my whereabouts to my chief clerk, with instructions not to be disturbed unless the business was of extreme importance. I was more than astonished, then, when the colored boy approached with the message that there was a lady in the reception-room to see me.

"I wanted to stand her off, sir," explained Cecil, "but she said it wouldn't go. She had been to your office and found that you would probably be at the club all day. Her business wouldn't stand any delay, she said, and it would be all right, any way, sir."

A woman tracking me to the club! Had Mme. Dupierre been angered by my curtness on leaving the house and determined upon having prompt satisfaction? Perhaps she had been to Chadwick and learned the nature of his advice to me. Perhaps she was prepared to push matters to the extreme limit at once.

All my courage and resolution vanished. I admit that I trembled with fear as I asked Cecil what manner of woman she was who dared to invade that sanctum sanctorum of discreet and decorous bachelorhood.

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer," said the boy, his eyes bulging out in admiration, "she is a mighty fine lady, sir; tall and slim and graceful, and has big, beautiful eyes. Here's her card, sir."

"Mrs. Helen Barton," was the name inscribed.

I gave a sigh of relief, but was immediately beset with other fears. What could Mrs. Helen Barton want with me? Was there some new development in the drama? But there was no time for speculation.

I went to the reception-room, much perplexed, yet prepared to meet a beautiful woman, but the radiant vision that rose to greet me quite took my breath away. She was robed in a fashionable spring costume, which fitted her faultless form to perfection. I could see her magnificent eyes glowing beneath a dark veil, and the full lips parted in a winning smile as she noted the ardent admiration in my world-beaten features. When she lifted the veil I thought I never had beheld a lovelier or sweeter face. At that moment I not only forgave Paul Chadwick for falling in love with Mrs. Barton, but I was madly jealous of his forestalling the homage that I was now ready to pay. Case-hardened bachelor that I was, I fell a helpless victim to the luster of her dazzling eyes and the music of her heart-stirring voice.

"You doubtless wonder," Mrs. Barton began in slow,

tremulous tones, "why I should seek an interview with you, Mr. Mortimer. I can explain in a very few words. Colonel Chadwick who, as you may be aware, is a very dear friend of mine, has told me of your loyalty to him and of the very sensible advice you gave him with regard to my divorce proceedings. I thank you very much for the suggestion you made, for a woman, Mr. Mortimer, cannot be too careful in this cold, heartless city how she safeguards her honor. Honor is all that some of us, myself unfortunately among the number, have to shield us from the roughness of the madding crowd. You will pardon me, I am sure, Mr. Mortimer, for once more expressing my heartfelt thanks for your gentlemanly consideration."

She paused to give me a chance, as I thought, to utter a compliment. I did the best I could in that line, assuring her that I was more than glad to have been of any service to her. Those fine eyes played full upon me as I spoke, and I was becoming uneasy and nervous under their beams.

"It is, I know, somewhat out of the common for a woman to thrust her affairs upon a stranger," she resumed in the same low, musical tone, "but I felt from the moment that Paul, I mean Mr. Chadwick, spoke of your great worth that you would be my friend as well as his."

She looked at me appealingly and I bowed in response. She continued:

"I need a friend, Mr. Mortimer. I am far away from my home and those who should guide my inexperienced steps at this juncture of my life. I have no one to apply

to for counsel in those many delicate affairs that trouble a lonely woman in a strange city. Therefore, Mr. Mortimer, I have taken the liberty to come to you. I wish very much for your friendship. I would esteem it a very great favor indeed if you would act as my—say, my brother—in a little matter that is bothering me very much at this time."

Now, while I was still in a measure under the spell of the woman's beauty, I realized that Mrs. Barton was not only conducting herself very oddly, but was preferring a very strange and unusual request. But what was I to do? I had not the slightest notion of what she was leading up to, but I thought it prudent to remark that, although I was willing to aid her to the best of my ability, it might be advisable to call Paul Chadwick into our council.

"I have thought of that myself," she quickly rejoined, with perhaps a tinge of disappointment. "But this matter concerns him, or will" (blushing prettily) "in the near future. I will be frank with you, Mr. Mortimer. You are, I think, familiar with the outlines of my story. I have been harshly, cruelly treated. My early life was passed amid surroundings that crushed and strangled all high aspirations. My parents did not understand me. They wished to mold my career to suit their own vulgar views of life. I left home to work for myself—to try and win a higher station than they wished me to occupy. In an unfortunate moment I married. I say unfortunate now, but at the time I loved, or thought I loved, my husband, who proved a cruel yokemate, and finally deserted me for another woman. It is from that man, George Barton, I am now seeking a divorce. So much, I believe, you know."

Again I bowed, and she proceeded:

"It was my good fortune—yes, a blessing from heaven, I think—to become acquainted with Colonel Chadwick a few weeks ago. He was interested in my story and was quick to befriend me. His friendship, I have reason to know, has ripened into love. That love, Mr. Mortimer, is fully and sincerely reciprocated by me. Indeed, I may say that, once I am free, I shall become the wife of your friend—a proud and happy wife, I can assure you."

"And a very beautiful one, too," I remarked, in spite of my previous resolve to dislike this glorious woman, who seemed to be pouring out her heart secrets as though I were an old and cherished friend.

The compliment pleased Mrs. Barton. She smiled as she bent her shapely head in acknowledgment and murmured:

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Mortimer; you give me courage to proceed."

There was a pause of a few moments, during which those splendid eyes were apparently rapt in a happy reverie. She sighed as she resumed her confidential talk:

"I have every reason to be happy, as you know, but unfortunately just at this time my mind is somewhat disturbed. It was my lot to form the acquaintance of a gentleman in Europe who came to my assistance in that crisis of my life. He was a friend of my husband, whom he bitterly denounced for his cruel desertion of me. I was temporarily in want, and he loaned me money. I have some delicacy in speaking of that, but I wish to be per-

fectly frank with you. I want your friendship and your aid in relieving me of the only trouble that now besets me."

A light broke in upon me at last. Mrs. Barton's desire for friendship was purely selfish. She had another lover; perhaps she had compromised herself with him. She wanted my help in keeping Paul Chadwick ignorant of the fact. I was to aid her in pulling the wool over his eyes in case of unpleasant developments.

"You must pardon me," I said somewhat curtly, "if I do not see my way clear in this matter. I think the world of my friend——"

"Yes, yes," she interrupted with a slight ring of anger in her voice. "I understand. You decide at once that I am about to commit you to some dishonorable course. That is where a lonely woman is always at a disadvantage. I confess, Mr. Mortimer, that I am disappointed in my estimate of you. I came to you with the purest motives, and yet as soon as you fancy a speck is visible on my character you become cool as an iceberg. Now, I do not wish you to do injury to your conscience in the slightest degree. I am an honest woman, sir, in spite of your suspicion."

"My dear madam," I expostulated, "I have not questioned either your motives or your honor. You must know that this interview is proceeding on a peculiar line. Naturally, I am at a loss to comprehend why an appeal should be made to me. But if——"

"Yes," she interrupted again, speaking with the same harshness, "you are going to dismiss me with a commonplace promise to do what you can. But" (and here the

woman changed to pleading again, exercising all the wondrous power of her voice and eyes) "I will not be so dismissed. I know you are my friend, Mr. Mortimer. I assure you there was nothing between George Bogardus and myself but the purest friendship. I am an honest woman in every way, Mr. Mortimer. This man, however, has chosen to fall madly in love with me. He is now in this city, and he swears he will find means to force me to marry him. He is a desperate man, sir, and I fear for the safety of Paul—I mean Mr. Chadwick."

She bowed her head upon her hands and seemed to weep. Her last words alarmed me.

"Has this Mr. Bogardus made threats against Colonel Chadwick" I asked.

"No direct threats as yet, sir," she replied, raising her swimming eyes to my face. "But he swears that no other man shall call me wife. It is my knowledge of his nature that makes me dread the consequences. He already knows, for he dogs my footsteps, that Colonel Chadwick is a rival, and should he become madly jealous, as I am afraid he will, Paul's life will not be safe."

"My dear madam," said I, rather scornfully, "you need give yourself no concern about Colonel Chadwick. He is fully able to take care of himself, and I still think it would be the better plan for you to take him into your confidence at once."

"Oh, no, that would never do," was her response. "I do not wish him to know of the existence of Mr. Bogardus, for the present at any rate. It would shock and pain him to

hear that he has a rival. I wish to spare him any such mortification. He has been too good to me, Mr. Mortimer, to be humiliated in such a way."

"Then, in what manner can I assist you? Do you wish me to see Mr. Bogardus and tell him in your name that his suit is objectionable?"

"Perhaps that would be well, and yet it might lead to a passionate and dangerous outbreak."

"My dear madam," I cried impatiently. "I don't care a snap for this Mr. Bogardus. You say that he is annoying you, that your relations with him are and have been entirely proper, but, in order to spare Colonel Chadwick any pain or humiliation you wish this man checked in some way. I have made one or two suggestions looking to that end, neither of which meets your approval. It is a business I do not invite, but I can assure you that I am not afraid of this Mr. Bogardus, bold or desperate as he may be. My opinion is still that you have made a mistake in coming to me. You should have placed this delicate affair in the hands of your affianced husband, for such you inform me Colonel Chadwick is."

Her big eyes were again brimful of tears, but her voice was steady enough as she responded to my tirade.

"All that you have said, Mr. Mortimer, is very, very true, and it shows how weak and silly I am. You can see how I really need a true and brave friend. I am sorry to have troubled you, but from Paul's account I made sure that you would hasten to serve me if I explained my trouble. But man's friendship may be stanch and true

where man is concerned and yet be denied a poor, lonely woman, who knows not where to turn for succor in her deep distress."

Now, I knew this was stuff and nonsense, but she had such a pitiful look and her words contained a slur against my loyalty to Paul Chadwick and conveyed such a deep sense of feminine weakness that I yielded once more to the charm of her presence.

"Mrs. Barton," I said, earnestly, "you have entirely mistaken my meaning. I shall be happy to aid you in any possible way. I am yours to command. Indicate what you want done and I shall do it."

She caught my hands and pressed them convulsively within her own as she cried:

"Now I know you are indeed Colonel Chadwick's friend!"

For a few minutes she was silent, but she still retained my hands, much to my embarrassment. Finally she released them and with a quick glance of gratitude continued:

"The easiest way out of the difficulty will be the best. Mr. Bogardus haunts my present boarding place. I think it would be well for me to move."

"That would certainly be an easy way if you can manage to keep your new residence secret."

"I am glad you agree with me, Mr. Mortimer. I wanted to consult you about taking a room at Mme. Dupierre's."

"Why," I cried, in amazement. "That is where Colonel Chadwick and I live."

"Yes, I know," was her calm response.

"But don't you think it will lead to ill-natured gossip when it transpires that you are the—the——"

"The affianced wife of Coloned Chadwick. Perhaps so, but what of that?"

"Then it will be so easy for this Mr. Bogardus to trace you there."

"It would not matter then. I should have Colonel Chadwick and your gallant self to protect me. And as for idle gossip, why, who could say a word if the good Mme. Dupierre took me under her wing?"

"You speak as though you knew Mme. Dupierre."

"Oh, yes! I have made her bonnets for more than a year."

A spasm of dismay seized me as this explanation tripped lightly from her tongue. Before I had time to reply she had risen and grasped my hand to say farewell.

"I am glad we have settled it so nicely, Mr. Mortimer," she cried, gayly. "You will all take care of the honor and comfort of a lonely and unprotected woman. But not a word to Paul. This is our own little secret, Mr. Mortimer."

She was gone ere I could utter a word either of protest or approval.

## CHAPTER V.

### A WARNING ABOUT BOGARDUS.

An uncanny feeling came over me as I returned to my nook in the smoking room. I did not like the part I had been made to take in this interview. Now that the woman was gone and my mind freed from her personal charm I saw that the position she had taken was illogical and, in a certain respect, unwomanly. She professed fear for the safety of Chadwick. She did not want him to encounter this detested rival. She objected to my giving the fellow a hint that his conduct was offensive. She wanted a new boarding-house so that she might elude his attention.

And yet when I pointed out that it would be easy for this man to trace her and subject her to further annoyance, she turned with the fickleness of the wind and said almost gleefully:

"Oh! It won't matter then. I shall have both you and Paul to protect me."

She did not want us to have anything to do with Bogardus, and yet took the very step, providing her story was true, to force our attention to him.

Neither did she see, or at any rate wish to acknowledge, that her invasion of the boarding house of her future husband was indelicate or imprudent. I am not a stickler for

the proprieties, but her resolve to live in the same house with Chadwick before marriage struck me as an unnecessary defiance of the rules of correct society. Yet, I was prepared to attribute that to ignorance of social etiquette, of whose niceties and necessities many lovely women know absolutely nothing.

But what worried me most was the fact that Mrs. Barton and Mme. Dupierre had known each other for some time. As may have been observed already, I am not apt in divining motives. Often when I try to solve ordinary problems of cause and effect I register a miserable failure. For this reason I invariably distrust myself when my mind is forced to bother itself with such complexities.

But in the present instance I could not help tracing out what I considered a curious series of circumstances.

Paul Chadwick met this woman with the alluring eyes by chance at one of his lectures. She was a perfect stranger to him; she could not have known that he was instantly smitten with her charms; and yet the very next morning she was at his law office pouring out a pathetic tale of her troubled past. He volunteers to help her to a divorce, and plunges deeper into the meshes of love. Before two months have passed he has promised to marry the woman whenever she is legally freed from her present husband.

Chadwick gives me his confidence, and in turn I try to warn him of probable snares in his path. He listens, but is not convinced. Yet he does adopt my suggestion that it would be the correct thing for another lawyer to undertake the divorce case.

Then comes Mme. Dupierre with her pretended solicitude about my appetite. She inveigles me into betraying the confidence of my friend. She hides the fact that she is already acquainted with Mrs. Barton, and she does not keep "our little secret." To whom does she reveal it? Why, to her friend, the milliner.

And she in turn imparts a distorted version of it to Paul Chadwick, who twits me with a supposed entanglement with the French widow, and advises me to marry her and avoid the humiliation of a breach of promise suit.

But who was the willful perverter of that innocent "little secret?"

Wasn't there covert satire in the closing remark of Mrs. Barton that "this is our little secret?" Did Mme. Dupierre tell her friend, the milliner, that I was hopelessly ensnared, or did she tell the truth and leave Mrs. Barton to invent that terrible fiction for some hidden purpose of her own?

As I mused over this alarming chain of circumstances, I became convinced that there was a conspiracy to drive me into matrimony. I might have gone further and concluded that Chadwick was embraced in this plot, but he was a willing victim himself, and may have innocently connived at the scheme for my undoing.

Now, as I have said before, there is something about the atmosphere of a club that is inimical to feminine supremacy of any kind. It would be as foolish as untrue for me to deny that I felt some dread of future developments. But I was not demoralized in the slightest degree. In fact, looking around at the crowd of jolly bach-

elors who had now gathered for their noonday smoke, I thought it would be cowardly indeed to surrender the privileges of this happy community without a struggle. I again began to feel brave enough to face the French widow. I persuaded myself that I could even look into the lustrous eyes of Mrs. Barton without flinching. And as for Chadwick, why I would show him that Robert Mortimer was man enough to keep his neck out of the matrimonial yoke in spite of all the tricks and devices of those artful, cunning, plotting women.

Just as I had come to this resolve I felt a heavy hand on my shoulder and a bluff voice cried:

"Hello, Mortimer! What are you mooning about?"

The speaker was Sam Bostwick, a broker and man about town, with whom I sometimes foregathered in the smoking-room. He was excellent company, shrewd and genial withal, but his pace was a trifle too rapid for an old fogy like myself. Drawing a chair near mine he continued his greeting in a line of badinage that rather startled me.

"Of course, I am not going to tell tales out of school, Mortimer, but that was a fine woman you were talking to in the reception-room a little while ago. You seemed to be on pretty good terms, too, I noticed. You'll have to look out or you'll find yourself in deep water."

"Oh!" I responded as carelessly as I could, "I don't think there is any danger in that quarter."

"Well, perhaps not,'" said he; "the danger lies in the fact that you are giving way to feminine charms at all."

"I guess I am old enough to take care of myself," was my rejoinder in the same indifferent tone.

Bostwick looked at me sharply before he said:

"You are old enough, certainly, Mortimer, but it is not always safe to be too confident. If you are at all touched in that quarter, as you termed it, the more caution you exercise the better."

"Why," I asked somewhat excitedly, "do you know the lady?"

"Well," he answered evasively, as I imagined, "I have seen her in the company of a Western man named Bogardus."

"Does that fact imply any unusual reason for my being cautious?"

"I think it does. Bogardus is a kind of an adventurer, a mining expert, he calls himself, and, judging him roughly, I should say he is not a man to be trifled with."

As this simply bore out what Mrs. Barton had told me concerning Mr. Bogardus, the warning did not alarm me in the least. Bostwick saw that I was undisturbed, and continued:

"You seem to take it quite coolly. Perhaps you know Bogardus also?"

"I have heard of him."

"Then you know his relations with the woman?"

"That matter is also within the range of my knowledge."

"Well, all right, then. I have nothing further to say, except that you seem to be a little reckless."

Bostwick's manner, rather than his words, made me uneasy. He had told me nothing thus far that did not comport with the honesty of Mrs. Barton, and in fencing with

him I had simply used the weapon that the woman had voluntarily placed in my hand. But something told me that he was withholding information that might be of value.

"Bostwick," said I, slowly, "you were doubtless surprised at seeing me in company with that lady. Now, I do not want you to get a wrong impression. I never saw her before to-day, when she came to consult me in regard to rather a delicate piece of business that does not immediately concern myself."

"That is odd," was his sole comment, as I watched the effect of my communication.

"I agree with you, but let me ask you something in confidence. Do you know anything that reflects seriously against the character of the lady?"

"That depends pretty much upon circumstances," Bostwick replied, cautiously.

"Supposing a friend of yours was infatuated with the lady and determined to marry her, would you feel justified, from what you do know, in interposing to prevent that result?"

"Perhaps not, if she were legally divorced."

"Then why that insinuation about her 'relations' with Bogardus?"

"I catch your drift, Mortimer. When I answered vaguely, I did so on general principles. Long experience teaches me that it is rank folly to attempt to interfere with a man in love. He is blind to what other people may see, and the voice of the charmer is more potent than the voice of

friendship, no matter what reason or justice may prompt the latter. A man in love is like a man doomed to the gallows—he must have his swing. Nobody can open his eyes but the woman herself, and it is not her interest to undeceive him as to her supposed merits or the fleeting qualities of her charms. That is the reason why I fenced with your pointed question."

"But were you to speak your mind——"

"Were I foolish enough to do that, my dear fellow, my words would run in this fashion: 'Of course, you will please yourself and ultimately marry this fair creature, but in doing so you are inviting all manner of mischief to fall upon yourself. I have the best of reason for believing that she is an adventuress in the accepted sense of the word. One of her male associates is, to say the least, of doubtful reputation. In fact, he is nothing but a professional gambler, and you must know that good women, as we call them, do not smile on that class of men. Remember the old adage that birds of a feather flock together, and be warned in time.' That is as far as 'speaking my mind' would go."

"You said one of her male associates. Has she others?"

"Two others to my knowledge. You are one of them, Mortimer."

"Ah! And the other?"

"Your friend, Colonel Chadwick. But surely he is not soft in that quarter?"

"Stranger things have happened, Bostwick," I answered rather sadly.

"Well, if such should be the case," was his significant rejoinder, "I think I would speak my mind a little stronger, even if I had to draw the long bow. I would risk a modicum of defamation, if necessary, to make him cry halt. Chadwick deserves a better fate."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE WAYS AND WILES OF WOMEN.

Everything seemed to be conspiring to set me against Mrs. Barton, and yet I was now her pledged friend and confidant to some extent. I tried to persuade myself that it was my duty to speak plainly to Chadwick, but when I summed up the reasons I could advance by way of warning I was obliged to admit they were not such as an honorable man could use to the disparagement of a woman. She had told me of Bogardus of her own accord, and there was more of innuendo than tangible charge in what Sam Bostwick had said.

After due reflection I decided to let matters take their course for the present, promising myself to be wary and watchful, and above all to keep a weather eye upon Mme. Dupierre.

Mrs. Barton was undoubtedly quick and decisive in her movements. She was already installed at our boarding-house when I went to dinner that evening. There was a flash of triumph in Mme. Dupierre's eyes as she introduced us, but Mrs. Barton gave no sign of recognition. It was her purpose evidently to make it appear we had never met until that moment.

Chadwick was genuinely surprised when he found Mrs.

Barton installed as a permanent guest. But he showed no symptoms of displeasure. On the contrary, her bold step met with his hearty approval.

The lovemaking went on swimmingly, in fact, a little too swiftly now. When they were not out to an entertainment of some kind Chadwick and his inamorata practically monopolized the parlors of an evening. She could thrum a few chords on the piano and sang worse than she played, which was rather odd, since her voice in conversation was low and rich and sweet. When she raised it in song it got entirely beyond her control and performed curious antics. It soared between a wail and a screech and struck one's tympanum with piercing discord. But Paul drank in the chaos of sounds with enraptured ears, which was also strange, since he had excellent taste and was fond of good music. I suppose the glamour of love affected his ears as well as his eyes.

Outwardly they were a well-matched pair. There was some disparity in their years, but that counts for nothing where the old heraldry of hearts and hands obtains. In her presence Paul was boyishly enthusiastic. Love shone joyously in his face and added grace to his movements. Mrs. Barton was demurely placid, as became her status as a married woman awaiting divorce. At times, however, some spark of passion would assert itself, and then her glorious eyes lighted up with heaven's own fire and her tempting lips parted with smiles as rare and radiant as a day in June.

Did she love him then? I have often asked myself that

question and left it unanswered. Well, if she did not, she was an adept in dissembling. It was most excellent fooling, and Paul was too honest himself to suspect deceit in the woman he loved.

But affairs progressed so tranquilly that my suspicions were lulled. Mme. Dupierre was less demonstrative than usual. Paul dropped no hint concerning my supposed entanglement with her. Mrs. Barton never reverted to our interview at the club. Bostwick volunteered no further advice or warnings, and from the background Bogardus gave no sign of revolt or impatience.

The divorce was obtained at last and the date of marriage fixed. Not a flaw had I been able to pick in Mrs. Barton's deportment, and I was flattering myself that she was all that Paul's exuberant fancy painted her.

Two or three days before the wedding Mme. Dupierre, whom I had kept at arm's length for prudential reasons, came to my sitting-room in a dire state of distress. She begged me to excuse her agitation. Nothing but impending disaster would have prompted her to thus intrude upon Mr. Mortimer's privacy. While I half suspected some trick on the part of this cunning little Frenchwoman, her unhappiness seemed so real that I consented to listen to her.

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer," she began in a self-reproachful way, "of all women I am the most miserable, the most wicked. I have a viper nursed to my heart and she has stung me. I have been good to the poor and the distressed, and she has turned and tell me 'Bah! You are

one old fool!' I have been like the mother to a beautiful devil. I have chaperoned and coaxed and played the spy, and she snap her fingers and cry, 'Ah, what the devil do I want of you? You make me weary.' Mr. Mortimer, my heart it is breaking."

"I am sorry you are in trouble," said I cautiously, and moving my chair further away from her, "but if you have had a fuss with the cook or one of the housemaids the remedy is in your own hands."

"No, no!" she cried excitedly. "You mistake, Mr. Mortimer, you mistake! It is not the cook, it is not the housemaid. It is the beautiful devil. It is Mrs. Barton."

"Mrs. Barton!" I exclaimed. "What is the matter with Mrs. Barton?"

"She is a wretch. She is very wicked. She has deceived me. She pull the wool over the eyes of your friend, the good colonel."

Mme. Dupierre gasped these sentences in a hysterical manner. I was as much alarmed by her excitement as by the nature of the charge she was preferring against the affianced wife of Chadwick.

"Pray calm yourself," I said. "You are probably saying something that you will regret when this mood passes."

My appeal had immediate effect. With a strong effort the buxom landlady checked the palpitation of her ample bosom and forced herself to speak calmly.

"Mr. Mortimer," she resumed, "what I have said, it is true. I help her to seek the hand of the Colonel Chadwick. I give her the ticket for the lecture, and tell her how your

friend will adore her. I make of everything smooth and she turn and cry: 'Bah! You make one fuss and I ruin you!'"

"Do I understand you correctly," said I, amazed and bewildered by this confession. "You helped this woman to gain the hand of Colonel Chadwick?"

"Yes, yes, certainly."

"Then, you were merely acting a part when you extorted the 'little secret' from me?"

She shrugged her shoulders and said naively:

"What would you, Mr. Mortimer? It looked like one small comedy. You were groaning and moaning about your friend and his sweetheart. I wished to make of you cheerful. I try to get the mind away from its sadness."

"Yes," I bitterly rejoined, "and you succeeded admirably. But what have you to regret now that your plot against my friend has succeeded?"

"I thought she was as good as she was beautiful. I find she is false and wicked. I wish to save the Colonel Chadwick."

"But, my dear madam, you do not specify in what particular Mrs. Barton is false and wicked. I can understand that you have twinges of conscience for more reasons than one, but you have permitted Mrs. Barton to come to your house and mingle among the guests. You have encouraged her plans in regard to Colonel Chadwick, and at this late hour make hysterical charges against her honor and truth. I think you have been most to blame yourself if you have any real knowledge of facts detrimental to her supposed character."

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer," was the agitated response, "what you say is all very, very true. But the heart of woman you do not understand. I tell you she play upon me. She put the dust into my eyes, and I was fool to believe what she said. She is wicked, very wicked. She——"

At this point there was an impatient rap at the door and, barely awaiting the invitation to enter, Mrs. Barton swept into the room. She was attired in a rich, black robe with yellow roses at her corsage and looked superbly handsome. Her eyes were ablaze with indignation as she stepped in front of Mme. Dupierre and said in a tone of suppressed passion:

"And so, madam, you have carried out your threat and filled the ears of Mr. Mortimer with your vile slanders."

Mme. Dupierre, who had turned pale as the angry woman confronted her, stammered that she had merely been giving Mr. Mortimer a few facts for his own private information.

"I have also a few facts for the information of Mr. Mortimer," said Mrs. Barton, turning to me with glowing face. "This woman" (indicating the landlady with a contemptuous gesture) "pretended to befriend me. She had learned that Colonel Chadwick had won my heart. She made it her business to instruct me how to become acquainted with him in honorable fashion, and when that happened she advised me to come to this boarding-house so that she could, as she said, give respectability to the courtship and stand my dear friend in the event of trouble. She knew my history. She knew how my young life had

been overshadowed with a great sorrow. She sympathized with me and won my confidence. Ah! Mr. Mortimer, you little know how precious sympathy is to the heart of a lonely woman."

"I protest," cried Mme. Dupierre, "I protest. Much of this is false. Believe me, Mr. Mortimer, this woman does not tell all of the truth."

"Do not be afraid, madam," continued Mrs. Barton, as she flashed a look of defiance at the discomfitted landlady, "I shall tell all the truth. I will be brief, as well as plain. I did not know then what mad thoughts were surging through this woman's breast. In her anxiety to promote my love affair, however, I soon learned that she was governed by motives of intense selfishness. This benevolent lady wished to promote her own amorous designs. She was herself in love——"

"Mr. Mortimer," almost shrieked the little Frenchwoman, "do not listen to this wicked wretch. She is one pack of lies. She speaks not a single word of truth!"

Again Mrs. Barton glanced scornfully at her foe and continued:

"I shall soon convince Mr. Mortimer that I am speaking the truth. Your friendship with Colonel Chadwick, sir, interfered with this woman's designs. She thought that were I to win the affection of your friend you would be at her mercy. For you, Mr. Mortimer, were first and foremost in this vain woman's eyes. It was your heart she was angling for. You were to be her prey when Colonel Chadwick led me to the altar."

"Ah, you devil!" shrieked Mme. Dupierre, "you worse than devil. It was you that invented the story."

"Pardon me," went on Mrs. Barton, unmoved by this outburst. "I shall convince the gentleman of my truth. You took the first chance to appeal to his sympathy. You dwelt upon his poor appetite, and you forced him to make a declaration of love."

"This is ridiculous," cried I, in thorough alarm, as Mme. Dupierre rose angrily to reply. "Let me beg of you both to carry the quarrel elsewhere. Such nonsense does not concern me."

"You will listen to me, Mr. Mortimer," said Mme. Dupierre. "What the wretch says is false. She said 'I will make Mr. Mortimer come to a declaration.' She said, 'He must marry you. We will make of it a little job.'"

"My dear sir," rejoined Mrs. Barton in her most persuasive tone, "I assure you that what I have said is true in every particular. You may recall the time when Mme. Dupierre wrung the confession from you."

"I remember nothing of the sort," cried I, angrily. "Neither Mme. Dupierre nor any other woman can truthfully say that I ever made love to her. But I am sorry that this quarrel has occurred. It places me in an embarrassing position."

"In what respect?" sweetly inquired Mrs. Barton, who was quite cool now.

"I suppose it is my duty to tell my friend that he is the victim of two scheming women," said I resentfully.

"Ah! yes," cried Mme. Dupierre. "Tell the good Colonel Chadwick what a devil he nurse to his bosom!"

"Yes, do," rejoined Mrs. Barton, in the same bland manner. "Tell the colonel the vile slanders that Mme. Dupierre is making it her business to circulate, and have your trouble for your pains."

"Now, ladies," said I desperately, "this quarrel was not of my seeking."

"Nor of mine," echoed Mrs. Barton, with a faint smile.

"But I think it well to advise Colonel Chadwick of these strange charges and countercharges. As for myself, I shall look out for other apartments, Mme. Dupierre."

"Oh! Mr. Mortimer," said the landlady, "do not let this woman's wicked tongue drive you away."

"By no means, Mr. Mortimer," sneered the other, "stop and let her carry out her plan to marry you."

"I think there is nothing more to be said," was my response, hoping they would both take the hint and leave.

"Well," said Mrs. Barton, changing swiftly to one of her charming moods, "perhaps it would be better to shake hands all around and forget and forgive."

"Jamais!" cried Mme. Dupierre, her eyes flashing fire, "never!"

"Ah! that is an unfortunate disposition for a fashionable boarding-house keeper to cultivate. I am sure, however, that Mr. Mortimer will see that it is to our mutual interest to treat this scene as if it had never occurred."

"I am not so sure of that," was my diplomatic remark.

"Oh! I think you will," she continued with the same sweet, captivating manner. "You do not wish to disturb the happiness of your friend, I am sure, Mr. Mortimer.

Nothing that this woman may say can shake his confidence in me, and interference on your part will simply destroy a lifelong friendship that I know you prefer to cherish. Now look at this matter from a reasonable standpoint. What have either of you to gain by seeking to wreck my life"

She cast such a mournful glance upon me as she asked this question that I felt my heart welling in sympathy with her despite her duplicity.

What had I to tell Chadwick anyway? Mme. Dupierre had made some hysterical declarations, but they were vague and formless when you came to examine them. Something of this incertitude must have been reflected in my face, since Mrs. Barton continued, almost in answer to my thoughts:

"And what can this woman say against me? That I wanted the love of your friend? Well, is that any crime? Am I the first woman to fall in love and want to marry the man I love? On reflection, Mr. Mortimer, I think you will conclude that it is not wise to tamper in the remotest way with the happiness of your friend. Paul Chadwick loves me with all his heart and soul, and I love him. Only mischief and misery can result from any attempt to come between us."

"Bah!" exclaimed the little Frenchwoman, in a tone of disgust. "That is humbug, Mr. Mortimer; it is humbug!"

"Perhaps so," I remarked, "but you certainly told me nothing that really reflects upon the character of Mrs. Barton."

"She did not give me time," said Mme. Dupierre.

"Oh! you can take all the time you want," sneered Mrs. Barton. "But perhaps it would be prudent for you to preserve silence. We have already offended and disgusted Mr. Mortimer with this unseemly wrangle. I am sure, however, when he comes to think the matter over, he will not attach any significance to the little quarrel of two match-making women. It will be much better," changing to smiling entreaty, "for you also, Mme. Dupierre, to shake hands and make up."

She advanced toward the landlady with extended hand, and Mme. Dupierre, after a slight struggle with her feelings, grasped it warmly and fell upon the other's neck weeping.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE HISTORY OF MRS. BARTON.

Now, it is not at all unlikely that the critical reader has formed an unfavorable opinion of my own character. I stand confessed weak and wavering. I am, perhaps, a trifle garrulous and lack the prudence which should attend upon years and worldly experience. But that is my misfortune. I am setting down scenes and incidents as they occurred and have no wish to exaggerate my own part or place in this story.

That I am slow-witted goes without saying. Any other man would have known exactly what to do when Mrs. Barton and Mme. Dupierre hung around each other's neck weeping. They had just been reviling one another with the utmost bitterness. They had almost come to blows. More than once during that terrible scene I was afraid the excitable little Frenchwoman would make an attempt to scratch out Mrs. Barton's beautiful eyes.

And what was the basis of this unseemly wrangle? Two women bent on matrimony agreed to help each other's project. One was successful. The party of the second part, thanks to my good luck rather than good management, was outwitted. Then the latter, in the mean spirit of an envious marplot, wants to uproot the happiness of the lucky conspirator.

And they make my sitting-room the arena in which to conduct a miserable, jealous squabble. There are charges and counter-charges, flashing of eyes and sharp, cutting words, and, in the end, tears and mutual forgiveness.

But for the serious manner in which my own affairs were dragged into the dispute I could have laughed and enjoyed this exhibition of feminine rage and reconciliation. It was apparent that I had been plotted and schemed against. These two women had gambled on the fate of two men with as little compunction as topers throw dice for convivial tipple.

I was an unwilling witness of that osculatory finale. Women's tears as well as women's kisses always affect me strangely. That emotional wind-up brought moisture to my own eyes, and I could not refrain from hovering over the reconciled couple and expressing a hope that they would live long and prosper forever as friends.

Mrs. Barton was the first to respond. She released her arms from the landlady's neck and said effusively:

"I am so sorry, Mme. Dupierre. Mr. Mortimer is right. We should be friends. But, oh! how you did make my heart ache!"

"My precious!" exclaimed Mme. Dupierre, in a smothered tone, "we must no more be estranged. We shall be like the twin sisters, never, ah! never to be angry again! Ah!"

And again they hugged each other and wept for joy that the estrangement was at an end. They went out of

the room with arms around each other's waist, leaving me to the reflections here recorded.

Nothing happened to mar the restored harmony, and three days afterward Paul Chadwick and Mrs. Helen Barton were wed. I never saw a happier man take the marriage vows, and as for Mrs. Barton, her big lucent eyes beamed naught but love and confidence as they came out of the church arm in arm, and drank in the good wishes of the friends who had assembled to wish them godspeed.

There was no wedding breakfast. The bride was opposed to display or publicity of that kind, and Paul himself wanted to monopolize the blissful incidents of the wedding day. The happy pair were to take a train for the East shortly after the ceremony, and within a week were to sail for a tour in Europe.

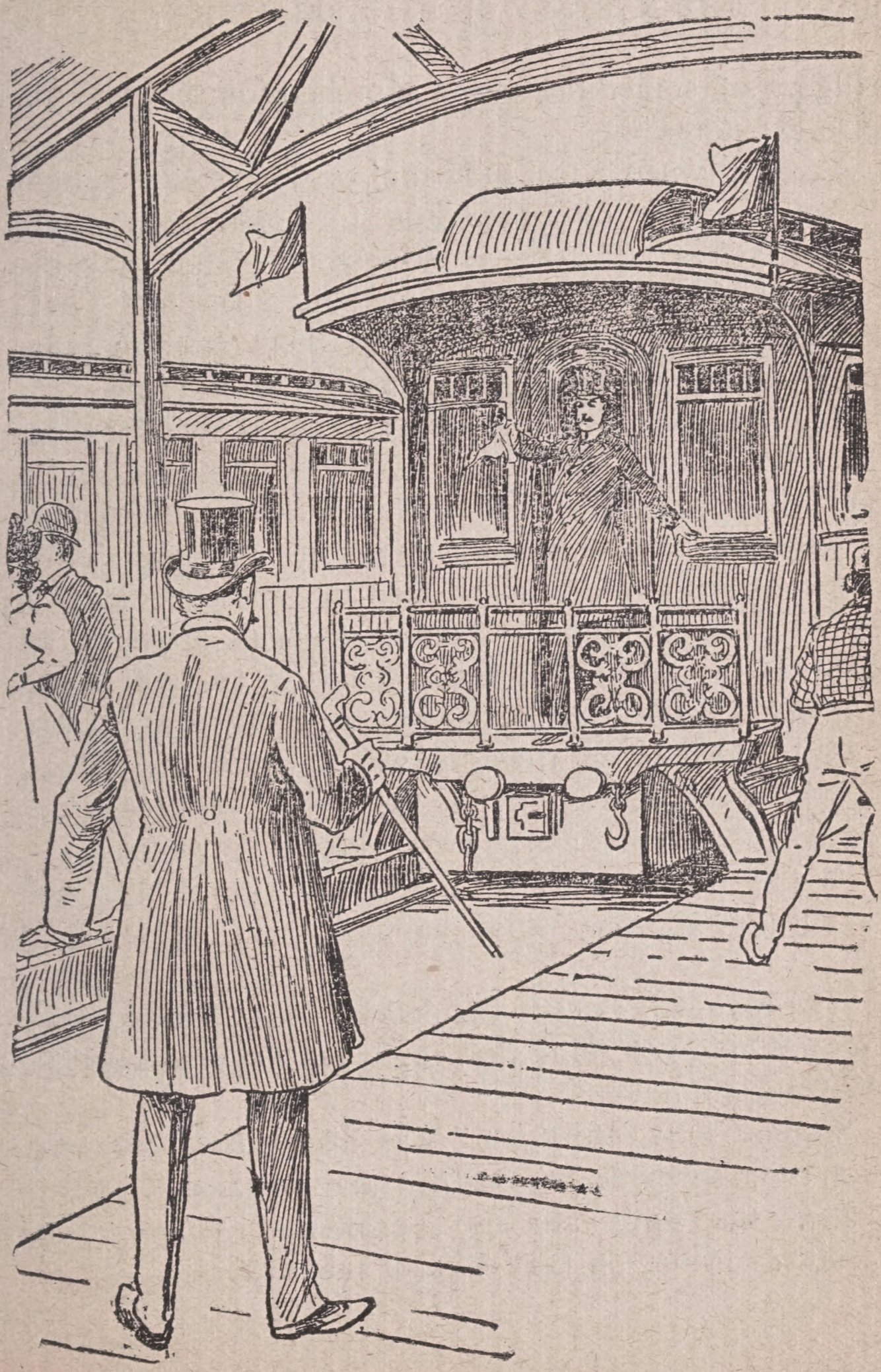
I accompanied them to the depot, and as I bade them good-by, Chadwick said:

"Mortimer, old fellow, there will always be a warm corner for you at our hearthstone."

Mrs. Chadwick smiled as she said in her soft, purring style:

"We shall never, never forget you, dear Mr. Mortimer."

There was a lump in my throat when the train pulled out and my old friend waved his hand from the rear platform of the sleeper. Now that it was over, I was not satisfied with the wedding. All my fears returned, and, notwithstanding the woman's smiles and soft speeches, I felt that I had been remiss in the duties of friendship in not



telling Paul something of the apprehension that had frequently plagued me.

As usual when I feel mournful or depressed I sought the solace of the Fraternity Club. Cecil made me as comfortable as he could in the smoking-room with my favorite brand of cigars and a refreshing mint julep, and I was beginning to pick up spirits under their cheering influences when Sam Bostwick came in and sat beside me.

Now Bostwick, as I have said, is a man of jovial tendencies. He is short and stout, with a chubby face, and a general air of good humor and good spirits. Moreover he invariably knows the best things in circulation, and a half hour spent with him is often the finest medicine in the world for the blues. But just then his presence, for some occult reason, somewhat disturbed me and chased away the sunshine that was beginning to warm my breast.

I remembered that it was he who added to my distrust of Mrs. Helen Barton in the early days of Chadwick's courtship. His first words now grated on my ears.

"It's all over," said he. "The gallant knight has won the fair lady and they will be happy forever hereafter, perhaps."

"I suppose you refer to Chadwick," said I, rather testily. "Why should you think that aught but happiness will result from the union?"

"Come, come, Mortimer," was his chaffing response, "don't get splenetic; it's bad for the digestion. You remember that some time ago I proffered a few words of friendly warning on that delicate subject."

"I remember," still testily, "that you gave me occasion for some serious and unpleasant thoughts."

"Ah! It was my intention to set you thinking. But when I first spoke I was afraid that it was yourself who was in danger, and you are too good a member of the bachelors' guild to lose in such a cause."

"Well, I believe you meant well, Bostwick; but I have often thought since that you were prejudiced against the lady. At any rate, she is my friend's wife now and we have no right to discuss her shortcomings, whatever they may be."

"I am glad to see you are chivalrous, Mortimer," said Bostwick a little more earnestly, "and it is because she is your friend's wife that I revert to the subject. Chadwick has been very foolish in this business, but he was warned and took the fatal step with his eyes wide open."

"Warned!" cried I. "What occasion was there for warning him? I have seen a great deal of his wife lately and she has impressed me as a beautiful, lovable woman."

This was not strictly true, but I was determined to defend the character of Mrs. Paul Chadwick.

"There was very grave cause for the warning," responded Bostwick solemnly. "I think I mentioned that a man named Bogardus was in some manner involved with the woman."

"Yes."

"Bogardus had a legitimate hold upon her. He had a right to step in between her and your friend."

"I do not exactly follow you."

"Bogardus was the woman's husband!"

"Impossible!"

"It is true."

"But she was divorced from a man named George Barton. I saw the decree myself."

"Well, George Barton and George Bogardus are one and the same man."

I was almost stupefied by this revelation. It embraced depths of deceit and wickedness that even I had never suspected in my friend's bride. But perhaps Bostwick was simply repeating idle gossip.

"You astonish me beyond measure," said I. "From whom did you get this information?"

"It came directly from the lips of Bogardus."

"But might he not be lying for some purpose of his own?"

"I will tell you the story of George Barton and his wife, and then you may judge for yourself. She was reared on a farm in Southwestern Kansas, that wild, semi-civilized section where the loco weed flourishes and men engage in bloody warfare to settle trivial disputes. You can understand that Helen Warmoth had few of the advantages or means of culture that modern maidens claim as part of their natural belongings. She had no drawing or music teachers, no Delsarte professor or instructor in deportment, but had to content herself with the meager acquirements to be derived from a village school. She grew into a fine country lass, with vain, ambitious longings. Her mother did not understand the proud nature

of her daughter. She wanted Helen to become a useful member of the community in which she was born, to fit herself for the arduous duties of a farmer's wife.

"But the girl turned up her dainty nose at housework and busied her mind with paper-backed novels borrowed from the small circulating library in the village postoffice. These novels were not of an edifying type. They dealt largely with the hardships and misfortunes of high-strung heroines with cruel and heartless parents, who invariably escaped from domestic tyranny to find the true joys of existence among sympathetic strangers, who made a business of helping beauty in distress and placing it where it might shine upon and ennoble the world. The effect of such stuff was soon apparent. Helen rebelled against restraint or reproof of any kind. She affected a lofty contempt for the farm and its surroundings. She persuaded herself that she was a changeling, and lived in the hope that some day a brave knight would come to release her from the wicked bondage of her parents, and convey her to his castle and proclaim her noble lineage and transcendent beauty throughout the land.

"Farmer Warmoth reasoned with the girl, and her mother alternately scolded and entreated her to dismiss such stuff from her mind and settle to the actual duties of life. But it was all in vain. The farm was no place for her, she angrily protested; she wished to go to Topeka to essay life in her own behalf. If she could not take this step with their consent she would take it anyway, she declared.

"Her obduracy, no less than her insolence, wore out both parents at last. She went to the capital of the State to learn the millinery trade as the stepping-stone to a brilliant career. Six months afterward, despite the protests of her parents, she married a professional gambler.

"Then began a life of feverish excitement. When times were flush with her husband she was petted and caressed and glittered in silks and diamonds. When he was beset by hard luck her costly garments and jewels were pawned, and I believe she was cruelly beaten if a murmur passed her lips. Yet she liked this better than the humdrum existence on the farm, waiting for the advent of a bucolic lover. This was life, she persuaded herself; perhaps not altogether the gay and dashing life that she had sighed for, but a life of bustle and variety. She who had bridled at the slightest reproof from father or mother took her husband's blows in silence, and, stranger still, loved him the more for the stripes he inflicted.

"Very soon George Barton had to extend the sphere of his operations. He took his wife with him to Europe, where he had a gigantic confidence scheme to work. She was now more in her element. She tasted of the pleasures of continental capitals, picked up manners that enhanced the effectiveness of her beauty, and acquired habits of finesse and deceit that were to be of great aid in her future career.

"Perhaps the brilliancy of European life upset her moral equilibrium, or what passed for such in her unstable nature. At any rate, she took advantage of the absence

of her husband to indulge in an escapade that came mighty near ending in a tragedy. She was on the point of eloping with a French count, a small manikin of a fellow, with the airs of a dancing master and the frenzied imagination of an absinthe fiend, when a friend of Barton interposed in time to save her. Barton was still infatuated with his wife, notwithstanding his lapses into cruel treatment, and he offered to take her back to his heart and protection. But by this time she had a wider experience of life and was excited with wild dreams of society and its gayeties. She decided to come back to her native land and call the divorce court to her assistance. She invented a story of desertion and cruelty and appealed to her father for help. Old Warmoth mortgaged his farm to obtain funds to enable her to leave Europe, and she returned to the farm in Kansas.

"That was a temporary shift, however. Both her father and mother were careful not to wound her sensitive nature. They never referred to her past life. Even Albert, her only brother, who had been savagely indignant about her foolish marriage, was now tenderly considerate of her feelings. The one aim of the household was to help her to forget her alleged trouble and devise means for her future happiness.

"To most women this experience would have been of saving virtue. But it had no visible effect on Helen Barton. The quiet of the farm irritated her. One misstep, she pettishly exclaimed, should not spoil her life. She was determined to face the world again. It was in vain the fam-

ily protested. She was prolific in excuses and inventions to support her resolution. She was too young, she protested, to pine her life away on account of a scoundrelly husband. A divorce was easy to procure and the world was yet before her. Her mind was made up to go to Chicago for a divorce, and to Chicago she would go in spite of everything and everybody. And again the poor old farmer involved himself in debt to send the wayward woman on her travels in search of a career suitable to her beauty and her pride.

"Arriving here she entered a millinery establishment. She comported herself fairly well, dressing in good taste and flirting with more or less discretion. George Barton discovered her whereabouts. He entreated her to return to him, but, while she did not cast him entirely off, she told him of her determination to sue for a divorce. She wanted him to have no legal hold upon her in the future. In some respects she was able to dictate terms. For reasons which often prevail with members of his class he had changed his name, and he could not conveniently assert his marital rights in the face of any opposition on her part. He saw she was obdurate, and agreed to a compromise. He was not to interfere with her plans, but to facilitate divorce by every means within his power. The remainder of the story in part you know, Mortimer."

"What you have related," said I, mournfully, "may be all true, but it is in the main the history of a wayward rather than a wicked woman. May not she make Colonel Chadwick a true and loyal wife in spite of the follies of her past?"

"I sincerely hope she may," was the response. "But I happen to know that she was angling to catch some rich old fool before she trained her batteries on Colonel Chadwick."

"Indeed! And who was the prospective victim?"

"Myself!"

"You, Bostwick?"

"It is true, I assure you. I fell a victim to those splendid eyes and that well-trained voice. Fortunately I learned the woman's story before the game went too far, but I was pretty near being caught. This man Bogardus came to me with threats. He showed me that the woman was still bound to him. That was before the compromise was agreed upon, and I judged from his tone and deportment that he was going to try the effect of blackmail on me. I consulted a lawyer and found means of circumventing him."

"But you said something about Colonel Chadwick being warned.."

"Yes, he was the lawyer I consulted."

"Come, Bostwick," I said, unwilling to accept this statement as true. "You are joking."

"I never was more in earnest in my life!"

"And what advice did Chadwick give you?"

"He told me to put the matter in the hands of the chief of detectives. I did so and had no more trouble with Bogardus."

"You, of course, made a clean breast of your entanglement with the woman?"

"Certainly. It was my knowledge of her true character that prompted me to warn you when I saw you in conversation with her in the reception-room."

"But why didn't you speak more plainly when I hinted that Chadwick was in love with her?"

"I was as explicit as I thought prudent. Then, again, you only hinted the unfortunate fact, and knowing that Chadwick was posted about the woman I did not see that I was called upon to interfere."

"You are sure you made the woman's identity plain to him during your consultation?"

"As plain as language could convey the fact. Yet, stay —hang me if I don't think I called her Mrs. Bogardus. That would have been natural enough, and I am pretty sure that I did now."

"Well, then, if Chadwick became acquainted with her as Mrs. Barton he would not be likely to associate her with the blackmailer's wife?"

"Perhaps not, if Bogardus kept in the background."

"Well, Bostwick, I happen to know that he did keep in the background. Colonel Chadwick thinks he has led to the altar an angel whose sole thoughts are for his well being and happiness."

"Well," concluded Bostwick, drawing up his shoulders with a gesture of despair, "he has made his bed, as the old women say, and will have to lie upon it."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### "THE LUCKIEST DOG ON EARTH."

As Sam Bostwick remarked, there was now no help for it. The mischief was done. Chadwick was hard and fast married, and he was in love with his wife. All I could hope was that the woman would rise responsive to his nobility of character and find rest and content in the home he would provide.

Three months sped and Chadwick returned to Chicago with his bride. I failed to detect much change in either of them. If anything, Paul was a trifle thinner and his hair, which had always been thick and flowing, was dropping out at the temples. His eyes were bright, however, and there was the same honest manly ring in his voice.

Mrs. Chadwick was still radiant and winsome. The trip abroad had tinted her cheeks and enhanced the shifting virtues of her glorious eyes. There was a confidence in her demeanor which sat well upon her—an air of possession, it seemed to me, that was lacking before.

To my cautious inquiries Paul responded in great good humor. He was immensely satisfied with himself. How could he be otherwise with such a wife? he asked. She was a paragon of virtue and fine qualities. Her sole aim

was to minister to his comfort and drive care from his breast. He was, to quote his own language, "the luckiest dog on earth."

Perhaps it was because of my suspicions that I saw things which were not apparent to his fond eyes. Or perhaps it was only natural, in the first blush of matrimony, that he should still be blindly and devotedly loyal.

As the time passed, however, I was overjoyed to see that Paul was really happy. He refused to be anything else, in fact. Mrs. Chadwick set her face against several projects that were dear to him, but he gave in to her wishes without a murmur. He wanted to have a modest establishment of his own, for instance, instead of boarding with Mme. Dupierre. It was more in accord with his new dignity of a staid married man, he said. But his lovely wife preferred to board. There were so many cares in housekeeping which she wished to avoid as long as possible. Then, it was so nice to have her hands and mind free to attend solely to the dear colonel. She always called him colonel now. The title seemed to have a peculiar fascination for her.

There was another little matter in which she flouted him with equal tact and prettiness. Paul had a man's antipathy to those miserable poodle dogs which a number of women delight to pet and fondle. Many a time in his bachelor days I have heard him express himself like a trooper about this feminine fad. But Mrs. Chadwick had two of the snapping brutes and spent a great deal of time fixing fancy ribbons for their necks and preparing delicacies for their precious stomachs. It was absolutely sickening to see such

a lovely woman fussing over two ugly poodles when there were worthier objects for her surplus affection on every side.

But Paul never criticised in the slightest degree the excess of his wife's devotion to those poodles. I have seen a flash of the old spirit in his face when she called them pet names and kissed their moist black noses, and have looked to see his nervous feet kick them yelping from the room. But he repressed the impulse and acted a liking for the canine pets which it was utterly impossible for him to feel.

All this showed how completely he was under the woman's sway and how determined he was to gratify all her whims and fancies.

Paul plunged into business with more zeal and energy than ever on his return from the honeymoon. He had more reason to work now, he told me. It was his ambition to win fame and fortune. He was on the road to both before, but he redoubled his efforts because of his wife. She was to take her station among the highest and fairest in the land; his success in law and politics was to be used simply as the foil for her social brilliancy.

Mrs. Chadwick smiled and encouraged his new-born enthusiasm. She wanted her husband to aspire to and achieve eminence in state affairs. No one was better fitted, she said confidentially to me, than Paul to help mold and guide the destinies of the nation. He was a born politician and had an aptitude for statecraft that, under deft manipulation, should force him to the front. It was her ambition

to be the manipulator under whose spurring touch he should rise and shine.

I heard these mutual projects with growing pleasure. Again I was confident that the marriage would turn out well and praised my discretion in preserving silence at those critical moments of the past.

As the winter passed and summer approached again Mrs. Chadwick became rather restless. Her high spirits and confidence were displaced by spells of moody abstraction and she was not always so well mannered toward Chadwick. Indeed, there was ill-disguised irritation at times that worried me and set Paul agog with anxiety about her health.

"There is nothing seriously wrong with me, Paul, dear," she said one evening, when she had given way to a fit of petulancy in my presence. "But I have been doing a great deal of thinking of late, and I am worried about our future."

"Our future, Helen," exclaimed Chadwick in surprise. "Why, there is nothing in that to alarm you, dear. My business is more profitable than it has ever been, and I stand better politically. There is even a fair chance of my going to Washington soon. I do not see what there is in our future to trouble you."

"It is that very fact that you are more prosperous, Paul," she said, in a soft, sad tone, "that worries me. You know, dear, how inferior I am to you in a great many ways."

"Rubbish!" cried Chadwick, with one of his pleasant laughs.

"No, Paul, it is not rubbish!" she went on in the same strain. "My education was not what it should have been in my youth. Poor, dear father did what he could, but there were few facilities in our village school, and" (sighing heavily) "after I left home life did not shape itself so that I could improve myself."

"You dear child," said he tenderly. "But why recall those unhappy days?"

"Only to show how much I appreciate and wish to be worthy of the present, dear," was her mournful response. "Every day I realize more and more that I am not worthy of this great happiness. I am not accomplished enough to be your wife, dear."

"But I wouldn't have you otherwise," he cried enthusiastically. "You are good and beautiful, and that is better than being clever, Helen."

"Yes, I know, Paul; that is very pretty and sweet. But I won't always be young, and you will tire of the face that now pleases you."

"Never, Helen, never!" was the loving cry, as he leaned over her chair and stroked her forehead. "You will always be young and beautiful and charming to me."

Now this was getting decidedly too sentimental for me, and I rose for the purpose of leaving them alone.

"Don't go, dear Mr. Mortimer," she said appealingly. "Don't let this foolish husband of mine disgust you with his nonsense. I may want your aid, Mr. Mortimer."

"Aid for what, dear?" asked Chadwick, as I reluctantly resumed my seat.

"To prove to you that I have cause to worry about my mental shortcomings—about my want of those graces which should belong to the wife of so clever a man as yourself, Paul."

Chadwick was pleased with this praise, I could see, but he was very much in earnest when he answered:

"I am sure Mortimer will agree with me that there is no need of a change in you in any particular, Helen."

I saw they both wanted me to say something, but the only sentiment I could think of was rather bunglingly expressed.

"Mrs. Chadwick is perfect to my way of thinking," I said. "Any more graces would spoil her."

Paul smiled his thanks, but Mrs. Chadwick pouted as she responded:

"Yes, that is just the way with you men. You never give a woman credit for wanting to be anything else but pretty and attractive. Now, I have other aims. Yes, dear, I have" (as he was about to express amused astonishment). "I am in earnest, and I do not want you to make fun of me."

"I had no such wish," was his reply. "Well, let us hear of those other terrible aims. I hope they will be such as I can forward."

"They are, Paul, and I am thankful you have at last come to my way of thinking."

"How can you say that, dear?" he rejoined lightly, "when I really do not yet know what you are hinting at?"

"The fact is, Paul," she said, slowly and impressively, "I think we ought to go abroad again!"

"Abroad again!" he exclaimed. "Why, that is impossible at present. I have several matters in hand which will require all my attention for months. But what has put that fancy into your head?"

"It is not fancy," she replied, sadly; "it comes from a settled conviction that I ought to begin to prepare myself for that change in our future which you say is sure to come. How would I look in Washington with my limited education and lack of society polish? I would simply disgrace you. You would grow ashamed of your poor, loving wife when you saw how ill she compared with the dashing beauties at the capital."

"My dear," responded Paul, "do not allow such trifles to bother you. I can imagine no station, however high, which you would not grace as you are."

"Ah!" she sighed again, "but everybody does not regard me with your compassionate eyes, Paul. The world is critical, cruelly critical. You would not want your wife to be subject to sneers and perhaps rebuffs on account of her limited education. And I should never feel sure of myself. I would be afraid of tripping on points of culture or custom. My very fear of offending good society might drive me into the faults I am anxious to avoid. Now, if we were to go abroad, Paul, I could study hard to fit myself for our future. I am not dull, you know, and I would soon acquire that confidence and knowledge that would enable me to fill the position of your wife worthily and becomingly."

"But, my dear," said the fond husband, "it is out of the

question for me to think of another foreign trip at this time. So much depends upon my being here. Now, if you will wait——"

"Yes, wait," she broke in petulantly, "wait and see you rise to the place you deserve, and find myself a millstone around your neck because of the lack of the education and polish I am so anxious to acquire."

"I am sorry," he began, but Mrs. Chadwick interrupted quickly, as though inspired by a happy solution of the difficulty.

"Why, Paul, love," she said, "I could go alone, if you do not see your way clear to accompany me."

"Alone!" exclaimed he, a look of pain overspreading his face.

"Yes, there would be no harm in that. Mme. Dupierre has a sister who keeps a pension in the Rue St. Antoine. It is not a very fashionable neighborhood, but Mme. Leon is highly connected and would be a desirable chaperon. I could learn the true Parisian accent there and become familiar with the ways of good society. Think how that would improve me, Paul. And then I could go to some equally respectable place in Berlin and get acquainted with the German language and German manners."

"But this would mean a long separation," said Paul, mournfully, "and I did not think you would tire of me so soon, Helen."

"Oh, you great stupid!" was her laughing rejoinder. "There is no question of tiring of you about it. I suggest the plan, so as to be more of a companion for you when you are in official life in Washington."

"But you have no need of French and German," he still protested, "and as for the other fancied accomplishments, you might just as well acquire them in this country —yes, in this very city—if you chose."

"My dear," she persisted, "you do not know where you will stop when once you begin to mount the political ladder. You may be minister to France or Germany, and then how pleased you would be to have me familiar with the ways of European capitals and able to speak the native tongues. Now, Paul, dear, I want you to think this matter over. The separation need not be long. You can run over when you get time, and if you get very, very lonely I can come on a visit to you. Let us both think of the happy end in view. I have made up my mind what is best to be done, and I want you to look at it from a rational standpoint."

"Well," said Chadwick, gloomily, "as you are so much in earnest I'll consider the matter."

## CHAPTER IX.

### BOSTWICK TELLS ANOTHER STORY.

As soon as Paul promised to take this project under advisement I knew that Mrs. Chadwick had gained her point. Once a woman gets that much of an advantage the rest is easy. Within a week he had sanctioned all her plans, and before she was two months older Mrs. Chadwick was under the protecting wing of Mme. Leon in the Rue St. Antoine, Paris.

Glowing accounts of her progress, socially and educationally, arrived with every mail. She was quite happy, Paul told me several times, except when she thought of his lonely lot on this side of the Atlantic. She hoped he would be able to join her soon, but should anything detain him longer than he expected they must both bear the privation and think of the glorious day of their lasting reunion.

I could see that Chadwick chafed at her absence, but not one word of wail passed his lips. Twice a week he wrote letters to his wife, and on Saturdays he cabled her a loving message. She was quite as punctilious as himself in this regard. Each mail brought him a budget of news and good wishes and on Sunday mornings he was always

cheered by a cablegram that assured him in its bald form that she was "still his own dearest love."

Six months elapsed and Mrs. Chadwick was still in the French capital acquiring the language and studying the styles of the gay world. Mme. Dupierre read us both extracts from Mme. Leon's letters telling of the graces and social successes of "la belle Americaine." The landlady seemed to skip a great deal at times—mere details, she explained, that were dreary to translate—but every sentence that bore upon Mrs. Chadwick's rapid progress in the beautiful arts was rolled with rich unction over her tongue. It reminded her so of her own young days in la belle France, Mme. Dupierre declared. Ah! how she wished she were back again drinking in deep draughts of pleasure that nowhere bubbled and sparkled as in gay Paris.

It struck me there was a little too much of this studied enthusiasm about our emotional boarding-house keeper, whom I had not yet forgiven for her plot against my bachelorhood. Sometimes her face belied the honeyed words on her lips and gave the impression that she was inventing phrases that would please rather than convey the exact shade of truth. Her tongue occasionally tripped on masculine names. She would read that Count D'Aubigne was assiduous in his attendance on Mrs. Chadwick, and stammeringly correct herself by saying it was the countess who could not bear her beautiful young friend out of her sight.

I do not know whether these slips affected Paul, but to

me they augured delitescent dangers in my friend's path. I was pleased, therefore, when in the early spring Paul announced that his affairs were in such shape that he could risk a journey to Paris to renew his acquaintance with his wife. He had the old snap and sparkle as he started on this glad mission. I never saw him in better fettle or feeling less anxious about the future.

But two months later he returned a changed man. There was a stoop in his shoulders, deep lines had formed around his mouth and underneath his eyes, and he was listless in his movements. He stated that the trip had not agreed with him; that he had suffered a great deal from headaches and insomnia, and that a celebrated physician had advised him to forego continental excitement and return at once to his native land.

He was somewhat reticent with regard to Mrs. Chadwick, simply saying that she was well and enjoying herself, and that he expected her to come back for good in the fall. Letters and cablegrams passed between them with the same regularity, but I remarked that Mme. Dupierre did not entertain us with any more extracts from the lively epistles of her sister.

Paul grew thinner and paler and was lax in business. His mind was often afield when it should have been concentrated on pending cases, and more than one of the judges shook their heads sadly as they whispered their fear that Chadwick was losing his grip. His insomnia increased and medicine brought no relief. When I urged him to stop work he said wearily:

"Work is the only thing that brings ease. Besides, Mortimer, my affairs are not in as good shape as they were. I do not seem to keep them in line, and I have some heavy drafts on my resources. I shall be better, I guess, when Mrs. Chadwick returns."

In October his wife came, more beautiful than ever, and laden with French gimcracks and finery. Her toilets were the marvels of Michigan avenue and sent Mme. Dupierre's female guests into paroxysms of envy and delight. She had acquired a great deal of the dash inseparable from Parisian life. Her conversation was spiced with French phrases, and she used her face and shoulders to lighten or give force to her expressions, according to the mood of the moment. She was decidedly improved, everybody admitted, but the veneering was too much in evidence to suit me. The woman seemed to make up in demonstration what she had lost in sincerity.

You could see that Chadwick was proud of the sensation she made in society. He brightened up directly after her arrival and went about his affairs with more spirit and direction. But the change was only temporary. The lines deepened in his face, his head drooped heavier on his shoulders and his carriage, formerly quick and graceful, became slow and uncertain. His physician told me confidentially that he could detect no organic disease. To the ordinary physical tests he responded as well as anyone, but one had only to glance in his face to see that the man was wasting away from some cause or another.

"He puzzles me completely," said the doctor. "I sus-

pect the trouble is mental. And yet Chadwick is not a man to worry over ordinary matters. There used to be a great deal of rebound in his system, but this trouble, whatever it may be, seems to have taken all the spring out of him."

Mrs. Chadwick was at first tenderly solicitious about his health. She hovered around him in the evening when there was no social call upon her time, and tried to drive away the melancholy that was creeping upon him. He rallied at these ministrations, but there was a quick reaction and a deeper gloom overspread his face.

"Do not distress yourself about me, Helen," I heard him say a score of times; "go and enjoy yourself. I am always the easiest when I know that you are happy."

She would protest that her true place was at his side, and that without him she was unhappy and miserable, even in the gayest throng. Indeed, she protested altogether too much. Before very long her poodles and her ball dresses gave her more concern than the ailment of her husband. She preserved a show of interest in the latter, but Paul's want of elasticity undoubtedly fretted and annoyed her.

I was not surprised, therefore, when spring came again to find that she had obtained his consent for another European excursion. Away she went to Paris, and the cablegrams and letters flooded our boarding-house as before. She sent sweet inquiries after Paul's health, and he, although visibly weakening, urged her not to worry, but prosecute her studies diligently and faithfully for the great

end she had in view. For, strange to say, Chadwick, notwithstanding his failing powers, still hoped to win that high political station in which his wife was ambitious to move.

It remained for Sam Bostwick, who was always popping up as a bird of ill omen, to enlighten me as to the true cause and nature of my friend's condition. He came to my warehouse wearing an unusually solemn face one day in September that year and said:

"I very much fear, Mortimer, that the domestic affairs of your friend, Colonel Chadwick, are drawing dangerously near a crisis."

At any other time I should have frowned upon discussion of Paul's affairs, but I was myself seriously perturbed about him, and I suspected that Bostwick had something of vital importance to communicate. So I answered:

"I trust not, Bostwick. Has anything occurred to excite more than ordinary curiosity?"

"Let me ask you first," was his response, "if you have any knowledge of Mrs. Chadwick's goings-in in France?"

"Goings-on! Isn't that rather a strong phrase?" I replied, cautiously. "Mrs. Chadwick is studying French and perfecting herself in the usages of polite society. I see nothing in that which should be characterized so harshly."

"I understood that such was the excuse she gave for her prolonged absence," said Bostwick, "but I thought you had an inkling of her real business abroad."

"I know nothing except what she told Colonel Chadwick."

"And you suspect nothing?"

"Nothing."

"You surprise me. You do not suppose that Colonel Chadwick is equally innocent?"

"Innocent of what?"

"Her intrigues in Paris."

"You are treading on delicate ground," said I, warmly; "be a little careful how you attack the character of an absent woman."

"My dear Mortimer," was his earnest response, "I am no scandal monger. It is because I am interested in your friend that I broach this subject at all. You know that I was acquainted with the woman and her methods before Chadwick married her."

"And since that time," rejoined I, just as earnestly, "I have every reason to believe that she has conducted herself as a true and loyal wife. Unless you have positive evidence to the contrary, Bostwick, do not destroy my faith in her."

"I appreciate your position, Mortimer," said Bostwick. "The trouble is my evidence is too positive in that direction, and, what is more to the point, I believe that Colonel Chadwick, unless he is already prepared, will receive a rude shock this very day."

"Great heavens!" cried I, "has she taken a fatal misstep?"

"She has quarreled with Bogardus."

"Bogardus! The man from whom she was divorced?"

"The same individual precisely."

"But how quarreled?"

"An explanation involves a story, for which I see you are unprepared, and which may be painful to listen to, but which is nevertheless true as gospel. But I will be brief. Pray recall what I told you about Bogardus before. It was owing to his forbearance that she was enabled to procure a divorce. The compromise they made was selfish and mercenary on both sides. In return for his silence she was to supply him with funds. On her second trip to Europe after marrying Colonel Chadwick she was accompanied by this fellow Bogardus."

"How could that be? Chadwick went with her to New York and stood on the dock when she sailed."

"Yes, but Bogardus had passage engaged in the same ship. She advised him of her plans, and he kept out of sight during the leave-taking. But the fair Helen is as fickle as her namesake of Troy. The Count D'Aubigne, with whom she had her first intrigue, sought her out in Paris and initiated her into the mysteries of a certain species of high life. Bogardus became madly jealous and swore he would kill the half-crazy nobleman. He would have done it, too, had the count been in the United States. Only a wholesome dread of the guillotine kept him from murdering the little wretch in Paris. This, however, was not wholly to the disadvantage of Bogardus. I have given you an insight into his character. Helen provided him with money and the count put him into the way of utilizing his skill with cards to his great pecuniary advantage. When Colonel Chadwick went to Paris last spring all

three were on their good behavior. I have reason to believe that the colonel received one or two broad hints with a view to opening his eyes, but he either would not or could not appreciate their full significance and he came back without his wife. After her short visit here she was anxious to return to the wild life she enjoyed in Paris, and again the colonel yielded to her wishes. This time, however, Bogardus and her had a serious quarrel over money supplies, which she pretended could not be kept up to their previous high standard. He vowed vengeance. He returned to the United States to expose Mrs. Chadwick to her husband. He is in Chicago now for that purpose."

I could see it all now. I knew what caused Paul's sickness and drained his resources. I understood the slips of Mme. Dupierre on the name of the Count D'Aubigne. I penetrated the cloak of treachery and deceit worn by this "beautiful devil," as she had been so aptly termed. Why, I asked myself in mental anguish, why had I not thrown off my moral cowardice and warned my friend of his peril?

"There is no chance for mistake in this, Bostwick?" I queried, sadly.

"None in the least. I have it from the best possible authority, Bogardus himself, whom I met in a somewhat maudlin mood at the Palmer House."

"And has he been to see Chadwick?"

"Not yet; he is to go this afternoon. He may be there at this very time. Perhaps Chadwick will buy his silence.

That, at any rate, is Bogardus' game. He has a very poor opinion of your friend's acumen or sense. He says the colonel is a poor fool or he would never let that woman pull the wool so completely over his eyes."

"I will go to my friend," said I. "Unless this Bogardus is cautious there may be bloodshed."

"Nay, I do not think it will have that result," said Bostwick. "The fellow wants money, and unless I am mistaken in my estimate of Chadwick he will bleed freely to shield his wife's reputation."

## CHAPTER X.

### BOGARDUS EATS HIS WORDS.

Calling a cab, I drove hastily to Chadwick's office in the Waverly block. I found him at his desk with an open letter in front of him. As I entered he rose, with a glad cry, and said:

"Just in time, Mortimer. I am expecting a visit from a consummate scoundrel and I may need a witness."

He was not in the least agitated. On the contrary, a slight smile played on his lips and his hand was perfectly steady as he took up the letter and continued:

"For some time I have been pestered with anonymous letters from abroad containing slanderous matter in regard to Mrs. Chadwick. To-day I have received this note in the same handwriting, dated Chicago, making an appointment with me at this very time. I understand the man's mission and I intend to make short work of him in the presence of a reliable witness. It is lucky, therefore, that you came, Mortimer."

While I guessed the nature of the business I scarce knew how to respond. It seemed politic, for more reasons than one, to affect ignorance until after the coming interview. Therefore I simply said, in as calm a tone as I could muster:

"I trust it is nothing very serious, Paul."

"It may be for my visitor," he said, grimly, and I saw by the set of his face that Bogardus had tackled a dangerous man.

The office boy entered with a card before another word passed.

"Show him in," ordered Chadwick, adding in an aside to me: "This is my man, one George Bogardus."

There swaggered into the room a tall, muscular fellow, with long, sweeping mustache, a set frown and small, snappy black eyes, lurking beneath heavy brows. He was naturally a good-looking man, but gambler and blackleg were written in his dress and features. He had the reckless air assumed by the professional "bad man," which is not really dangerous when one knows how to take it.

Bogardus paused in his march toward Chadwick's desk when he saw there was a third person present. Paul noted his hesitation and said, coldly:

"Do not be alarmed, sir. This gentleman is my confidential adviser."

"My business is for your private ear," said Bogardus, warily. "I can call again when you are at leisure."

"I shall never be more at leisure than I am now, so far as you are concerned," responded Chadwick, in the same cold, steady tone. "You are at liberty to state your errand or not, just as you please."

"May I speak to you in private a moment?" glancing significantly toward me.

"No, sir," thundered Chadwick, "I want no private intercourse with you."

The man looked surprised, and I could see his small eyes flash as he again temporized.

"I do not think you are aware of the nature of the communication I have to make," he said, shortly.

"Oh, yes, I am; it is to serve as a basis for blackmail!"

"Blackmail!" echoed Bogardus in anger. "I advise you to be careful how you use that term, Colonel Chadwick."

"My dear sir," blandly rejoined Paul, "do not agitate yourself unnecessarily. I am somewhat familiar with your history and occupation, and I warn you that the heroic mood will not answer with me."

I could see that Bogardus was confounded by this reception. As for myself, I wondered how far Chadwick's knowledge extended and what course of action he had mapped out.

"Am I to understand," said Bogardus hesitatingly, "that you know I bear information concerning your wife?"

"You are to understand, first of all," answered my friend, still perfectly cool and steady, "that I know you to be the author of certain anonymous letters addressed to me from Paris."

"That is false," cried Bogardus.

"Oh, no; it is true. I have compared your note of this morning with them and find the handwriting exactly the same."

"Well," was the dogged response, "suppose that be so, what of it. Does that affect the gravity of my story, which, I again advise you, is for your private ear?"

"And again I tell you, sir, that I absolutely refuse to receive a private communication from you."

The gambler's eye flashed and again his hand went instinctively behind him. But he repressed the passionate impulse and compelled himself to respond in deliberate terms.

"Colonel Chadwick, what you may know about me is not of much consequence. You seem determined to work up a scene which I think you will regret in calmer moments. I will give you one more chance to hear me alone."

"And once for all," repeated Paul, "I refuse you that opportunity."

"Very good," was the steady response, "I call this gentleman to witness that I was adverse to publishing scandal. You have chosen to call me names and I have kept quiet because I wished to do you a service. I have no such wish now. If you are, as you pretend, acquainted with my past, you are far removed from a man when you continue your relations with——"

"Stop!" cried I, alarmed at the look coming over Chadwick's face.

"Oh!" sneered Bogardus, "you intend to take an oar, do you?"

"I intend to prevent you insulting my friend," said I, hotly.

"Perhaps you will also feel called upon to defend his wife."

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than Chadwick sprang from his desk and grasped the ponderous fel-

low by the throat. Paul was no physical match for the gambler, but anger gave him strength and the attack was so sudden that Bogardus was forced prone against the wall before he had an opportunity to make a motion in self-defense. In a moment, however, he had seized Paul's wrists and thrown him off. Then his hand delved back to his hip pocket, but I caught and pinioned it before he could draw his weapon.

This respite brought Chadwick to himself. While I struggled with his unwelcome visitor he reached into a drawer and possessed himself of a revolver. Covering Bogardus with the weapon, he said to me:

"Take away his gun, Mortimer!"

The man made no effort to resist; he was cowed by the fierce light in Chadwick's eyes.

"Now," continued Paul, "George Bogardus, scoundrel and blackmailer, take a seat. You may release him, Mortimer."

Bogardus scowlingly obeyed. I was inclined to stand guard beside him, but Chadwick motioned me away.

"You are probably now aware," he continued, "that you are engaged in a perilous enterprise. I did not wish to go to extremes with you, or, instead of my friend being here, you should have met the chief of detectives, with whom I think you have more than a passing acquaintance. But, to be candid with you, I wished to avoid any fuss in the newspapers. I imagine you are short of money."

"I am not very flush," quickly responded Bogardus, as though he saw circumstances shaping in his favor.

"And you would be willing, for a financial consideration, to sign an agreement to the effect that you are a notorious liar."

"No, sir."

He jumped to his feet, but a significant click of the revolver sent him to his chair again.

"I should advise you not only to attempt no further demonstrations, but to think twice before you reject the offer I am about to make," said Paul.

"Well, shoot away," was the gruff response.

"I will give you $100 to sign a paper to the effect that you know nothing detrimental to the character of Mrs. Paul Chadwick, but that you trumped up charges against her in order to extort blackmail."

"And suppose I refuse?"

"In that event, my friend, I shall hand you over to the police for final transmission to Joliet."

"That won't prevent me from talking."

"Perhaps not, but this will," and Paul made a significant gesture with the pistol.

"Well, you have the best of me this time," growled Bogardus, as he flinched before the muzzle of the revolver. "Draw up your paper and fork over the stuff."

"You do the writing, Robert," said Chadwick, "while I keep my eye on this gentleman."

Bogardus sneered as I took pen and paper and proceeded to write from the slow, measured dictation of my friend:

Chicago, Sept. 23, 188—.—I, George Bogardus, late of Paris,

France, and now of Chicago, Ill., do swear of my own free will that I am the author of certain anonymous letters mailed from France to Paul Chadwick, of Chicago, containing untrue statements in regard to Mrs. Paul Chadwick, wife of Paul Chadwick aforesaid; that my purpose in writing the before-mentioned anonymous letters was to estrange Mrs. Paul Chadwick from her husband, Paul Chadwick, of Chicago; that they were also a part of a plan devised by myself and without the knowledge of Mrs. Paul Chadwick or any other person whatsoever to extort money from Paul Chadwick of Chicago; that on the 23d day of September, 188—, I wrote and sent a note to the said Paul Chadwick asking for an interview in order to deliver unto him certain information relating to the conduct of his wife, Mrs. Paul Chadwick, now in Paris, France; that the information referred to in this note was wholly false and invented by me for the purpose of extorting money; that I am absolutely without any knowledge that in the slightest degree reflects upon the honor, purity and truth of Mrs. Paul Chadwick as a woman or a wife, and that I regret exceedingly and unqualifiedly repudiate any statement or statements to that or similar effect which may have originated from myself, or which I may have given sanction or publicity to in any shape or form whatsoever.

(Signed)

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 23d day of September, A. D. 188—.

(Seal) Notary Public.

"That will do, I think," remarked Chadwick when I had finished the document.

"Yes, it is very plain and explicit and binding," said Bogardus in rather a peculiar tone.

"You will sign it?" queried Paul.

"Oh, certainly," was the airy response, "for $100 spot cash."

"The money shall be yours as soon as you attach your signature in the presence of a notary."

"Bring on your notary," said the gambler, as airily as before.

Chadwick rang his bell and asked for Mr. Jones to come and witness a document. The notary appeared and Bogardus attached his signature in due form. Then Chadwick handed him two $50 bills with the remark:

"Now, Mr. Bogardus, you can make yourself scarce. I advise you to move out of Chicago to-night, as to-morrow I shall have you under the surveillance of the chief of detectives."

"I am very much obliged, I can assure you," sneered the fellow. "Perhaps you will request your friend to return my gun."

"No," cried Chadwick, as I was about to hand him back the pistol, "we will take care of the gun for the present. Now get!"

"Again permit me to thank you," said Bogardus, flippantly. "It may interest you both to know that that precious document does not bear my legal signature. I am George Barton, the former husband of your wife, and her present paramour. Good-by!"

Chadwick sprang up with a curse on his lips, but the gambler was out of the room as the last words fell on our ears. I could hear him laughing as he rushed from the outer office. Paul sank back and bent his head on the desk for a few moments. When he rose to hold out his hand to me his face was fearfully drawn and haggard.

"I ought to have killed him," he said, slowly. "I may do so yet. But, Robert, I have saved her name; poor girl, I have saved her name!"

"Bear up, old man," said I. "You made the villain eat his words, and all may yet be well."

There was not much comfort in that, but it was all I could find in my heart to say. Paul glanced in my face anxiously, as though he understood I knew the full extent of his sorrow. He read pity rather than condolence there. Dropping my hand with a heavy sigh and turning to his desk he said in a voice full of sadness:

"Over at last! Blighted and blasted! But I have saved her name; poor girl, I have saved her name!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### MRS. CHADWICK APPEARS.

How much Paul Chadwick knew of his wife's baseness, I was not able to decide. He had given Bogardus neither hinge nor loop to hang a direct charge upon. That rascal was pinned down to a recantation of previous slanderous statements. He was not permitted to utter a single word against Mrs. Chadwick during the interview. Only when he thought himself safe from summary vengeance did he venture that terrible parting shot.

As I have already described, Paul staggered heavily under the blow. His last words revealed a load of grief and woe, but beneath it all was that crumb of manly comfort—he had saved his wife's name! Not for many long days did I realize what wealth of charity and chivalry was covered by that phrase.

Paul said little about his troubles. He was not the man to find relief by bidding sorrow flow. Of my friendship he had often been assured, but there was a sacredness about this grief that made him repress any desire he may have felt for counsel or condolement.

He kept his thoughts and cares to himself, and I had no wish to intrude upon his private sorrow.

To Bostwick's guarded inquiries I responded briefly that no serious result had followed the visit of Bogardus to my friend. I told him that the fellow had signed a confession placing Chadwick in a position to resist any attempt at blackmail.

"That is good news," was Bostwick's comment. "He should now bring her from France and place her within the reforming influence of good American society."

But Chadwick's injury was too deep for sudden recovery. The furrows deepened in his face, his eyes were sunken and lusterless. He seemed utterly crushed and woebegone.

Two months after this episode he told me that Mrs. Chadwick had returned to this country, but they both deemed it prudent she should spend the winter with her parents in Kansas. That was the full extent of his confidence. Letters passed between them, but the correspondence did not dispel the gloom in which he was now enveloped.

One day, however, Paul came to me with a brighter aspect than he had worn for several months.

"I am going to Kansas," he said, "for a consultation with Mrs. Chadwick. It may be that she will return with me; that depends entirely upon herself. I have never discussed my domestic affairs with you, Mortimer, and I wish to say very little now. My marriage did not turn out as I expected, and you know that the tongue of scandal has been busy with my wife's name. Our estrangement was due to reports that were in circulation. I felt myself ag-

grieved beyond comfort. I thought I should never be able to overlook or excuse certain things. But Mrs. Chadwick has shown contrition, and as my sole aim has been to promote her happiness I am going to Kansas to see her. The visit may end in a reconciliation, Robert. I hope it may. It is not for me to sit as judge on an erring woman's conduct. I can make excuses for Helen, and I sincerely hope that I shall be able to forgive and condone all errors of the past."

There was infinite tenderness in his voice, and I knew that reconciliation depended upon the woman alone. That night he left for Kansas and next morning I was surprised by another exciting incident in this domestic drama.

Chadwick's clerk came to my warehouse early with the startling news that Mrs. Chadwick was at her husband's office and wished to see me. I went at once to the Waverley block and found her pacing the floor in deep distress.

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer," she cried, "we meet under very strange circumstances. I came expecting to find Colonel Chadwick, and I am told he has gone to Kansas. Yet he knew that I was coming. I wrote him a week ago that I would be here to-day. What can it mean?"

Now, I had not the slightest idea myself what it meant, but I replied:

"There has undoubtedly been some misunderstanding. Perhaps he did not get your letter. In fact, I am pretty certain he did not. It was only yesterday that he told me he had been summoned to Kansas to see you."

"He told you that! How very, very strange!"

Her big eyes were fixed full upon me, as though she questioned the truth of my statement. Before I could make any response she continued:

"Pray tell me what he said, Mr. Mortimer. If you are in his confidence, you will understand that I am deeply concerned in any communication he made."

Knowing what I did, I felt it would be extremely indelicate to enter into any discussion of my friend's affairs with his wife. Neither did I wish her to think that I was aware of any trouble between them. So I answered:

"Nothing of any importance was said. Colonel Chadwick simply told me that he was going to Kansas to see you, and he left last night for that purpose. He certainly would not have gone had he received a letter stating that you were coming to Chicago."

She seemed a trifle put out by my manner, which was cautious and restrained, as I deemed proper it should be under the circumstances.

"Mr. Mortimer," she said, rather impatiently, "you do not treat me with your usual frankness. It is foolish for you to pretend that you are ignorant of the recent estrangement of Colonel Chadwick and myself. I know that you were present at a certain interesting interview that took place in this very office on that subject. You would not have been called in unless you enjoyed Paul's full confidence. I think you must be aware that Colonel Chadwick has not treated me with becoming consideration in leaving town when he knew perfectly well that I was to be here."

"I can only repeat," I said, "that Colonel Chadwick did not know that you were on your way here. Why should he journey to Kansas to see you if he knew you were to be in Chicago?"

"That is one of the things that worry me," she responded, slowly and mournfully. "He has written very strangely of late. When he requested me to return from Europe and stay with my parents this winter his letter was full of untrue charges of misconduct on my part. He told me that you were aware of all the circumstances, that you had been present when Mr. Bogardus tried to get hush money from him by an attack upon my honor. Of course, I do not know what that man may have said or done, but I think that Colonel Chadwick and yourself have done me the justice of believing in my truth. But it is the old story, I suppose, of a woman having to fight her own battles when her honor is attacked. Now, you, Mr. Mortimer, could not believe this man Bogardus. I was honest with you on a previous occasion. I told you the man was insanely jealous and might try to do Paul some harm. I had no idea that he would attack him by destroying my good name. Oh! Mr. Mortimer, how could you sit and hear your friend's wife so maligned?"

"You must pardon me," said I, as she buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed, "but I cannot discuss this matter with you. Colonel Chadwick doubtless had his reasons for taking the steps he did. I am sorry that this contretemps has occurred."

"But I wish you to know that I am an innocent, wronged woman," she cried, raising her head quickly.

I suppose I looked incredulous, for she continued passionately:

"I begin to understand you now, sir. You were always opposed to my marriage with Paul Chadwick. You were jealous of my influence over him. You even tried to work him up against me after our marriage. Perhaps you were in league with this man Bogardus to poison Paul's mind concerning me."

"Madam!" I cried, in amazement, "this is outrageous."

"Oh! it is easy to protest innocence. How do I know but that you are to blame for Colonel Chadwick going away at the very time when he was expecting me in Chicago."

"Why, Mrs. Chadwick, you cannot be responsible for what you are saying," I indignantly protested. But she sprang from her seat and hurried on with her vituperation.

"I have heard of such friends before, sly, cunning scoundrels, without an atom of honor where a woman is concerned. You, forsooth, would come between husband and wife. You would use your devilish tongue to foment trouble. You would stand coldly by and hear an innocent woman slandered. Mr. Mortimer, I am ashamed of you!"

She was facing me with flashing eyes; her breast heaved and her hands were clinched. I was afraid the woman was mad.

It was no use trying to stem the torrent of her rage. My only thought was to calm her and if possible get her to listen to reason. I knew Paul wished to take her to

his heart again, and God knows I had no desire to keep them apart.

"Pray compose yourself, Mrs. Chadwick," I said as steadily as I could, "you are somewhat excited, and you will regret what you have said when you come to yourself. I have never interfered in the slightest manner between Colonel Chadwick and yourself. I was deeply and truly grieved when trouble rose between you, and I was overjoyed to hear that there was a chance of your reconciliation."

The angry light went out of her eyes and her features relaxed. She sat down and sighed deeply as she said:

"Forgive me, sir. I have been wronged by some one, and I am almost beside myself with grief. You said something about a reconciliation. Please enlighten me further."

I deemed it prudent under the circumstances to tell her the substance of Paul's parting conversation with me. She listened intently, but her face was almost expressionless.

"You have no doubt he was in earnest?" she asked, in a curious tone, when I concluded. "Was his mind all right?"

"His mind all right!" exclaimed I. "Why, there has never been any question of Paul Chadwick's mind being all right."

"Ah! you do not know," she said, in the same peculiar strain. "To you, perhaps, he appeared always the same. But he was of a quick, jealous disposition, and at times he was violent. It takes a woman to test a man's true character, and I have reason to ask the question that seems to have startled you."

What could she mean? I asked myself. I thought I was fully informed as to my friend's character, and I had never seen the slightest indication of unruly passion or viciousness. On the contrary, he was even tempered and broadly charitable where the faults of others were concerned. This woman ought surely to be aware of that. But there she sat, coldly insinuating that Paul was not what he seemed—nay, almost asserting that she had been physically abused by him.

Much as I wished to help smooth matters at this juncture, my voice gave expression to the indignation I tried to conceal when I said:

"Surely, madame, you do not intend me to believe that my friend was other than what he seemed?"

"Well," was her quick response, "he may have seemed different to you than he really was. He greatly annoyed me with his jealousy, and on more than one occasion he has threatened—but there, I am ready to forget and forgive. He is a dear, kind fellow, but for those fits of passion and gloom. I have been afraid at times that he would do himself an injury. Perhaps I should not have left him so long by himself. But you know, Mr. Mortimer, how pure and unselfish my motives were in doing so. I hope all will be well again soon. Don't you think I had better take the next train back to Kansas?"

I told her I would wire Paul on the train and ascertain what his views were on that subject.

"Oh, no! He might want to come back, and I think the change will do him good. I will telegraph father to explain my absence and say that I will return at once."

Of course, I could see no objection to that plan, and told her so. Then she became effusively apologetic.

"I know you will forgive my impetuosity, Mr. Mortimer," she said, using her eyes and voice in the old, fascinating style. "But you may imagine how I felt when I found that Paul was not here. After all that I have gone through, I am, perhaps, naturally suspicious and irritable. I seem to have an unfortunate habit of quarreling even with my best friends. You will forget what I have said, I know. You are entirely too good to treasure up those harsh words against me. Forgive me, dear Mr. Mortimer, for Paul's sake."

What could I do but assure the woman that I cherished no animosity, and only hoped that she would become reconciled to her husband. She seemed anxious to get rid of me after this. I offered my services during the day, but she said she would visit a dear friend and wait quietly until train time.

Might I not see her on board the cars? No, that would not be necessary. Besides, in view of the awkward fix in which she had been placed, she wished as few persons as possible to know that she was in town.

I was compelled, therefore, to leave the woman to her own course. She accompanied me to the office door and said sweetly:

"I shall tell dear Paul how kind and considerate you have been, dear Mr. Mortimer."

One week later I saw her again, in deep widow's weeds, bending with assumed grief over the casket containing the mortal remains of her husband, Paul Chadwick.

## CHAPTER XII.

### SUICIDE OR MURDER?

The news of Paul Chadwick's awful end caused a profound sensation in the city and State. Few persons knew of his absence from Chicago, and none could advance any adequate reason for his suicide. That he was failing in health was no excuse for self-slaughter, argued those who held him in high regard. He was not a man to brood over temporary indisposition. His mind was too buoyant, his nature too elastic to give way to trouble of that sort.

Yet there was the bald statement of the coroner's jury that Paul Chadwick of Chicago died from a pistol shot fired by himself with suicidal intent. The newspapers made every effort to obtain details of the tragedy, but correspondents were scarce in that lonely Kansas region and there was scant reward for their pains. From the telegraph operator at Arcadia the following meager information was at last secured:

"Colonel Chadwick arrived at the farm of his father-in-law, three miles from Arcadia, five days ago. He seemed very much annoyed to find that his wife had gone to Chicago and was upon the point of starting home again, when he received a telegram that Mrs. Chadwick would join him

on the following day. He became more composed after this, but after his wife's arrival he acted strangely. Yesterday, shortly after breakfast, Michael Warmoth and his son, Albert, went out to feed the stock. They had not been gone long when they heard two shots fired and saw Mrs. Chadwick running from the house, crying that Colonel Chadwick had killed himself. On going into the sitting-room, where they had left the unfortunate man and his wife barely half an hour before, they found Chadwick on the floor with a bullet wound in his right temple. His pistol was near him and the man was dead. Mrs. Chadwick was sitting on the lounge reading at the time of the tragedy. She was startled by the shots and ran screaming out of the room when she saw her husband drop bleeding to the floor. It is believed that Colonel Chadwick was temporarily insane when he took his own life."

On the strength of this statement, which was explicit enough for all practical purposes, the daily press treated the affair as an ordinary suicide, and, as usual, in such cases, tried to ascertain what motive Chadwick could have had for taking his own life. In short order something leaked out concerning his domestic troubles and the statement found ready credence that he had shot himself through inordinate jealousy of his wife.

Then followed the usual amount of comment, with biographical sketches of the dead man and the testimony of innumerable friends as to his genius and worth. There was universal regret that so estimable and valuable a citizen should have departed life in this unworthy manner.

His faults were overlooked and his virtues magnified by the press. Everybody had a kindly feeling toward Colonel Chadwick, according to the interviews published, and his character was extolled to the skies.

Two days later the telegraph operator at Arcadia dropped a few words that seembed to throw a different light on Chadwick's death. He wired that the man was shot through the heart, and not in the head, as at first reported, and that the real verdict of the coroner's jury was that Paul Chadwick came to his death by a pistol wound inflicted by some person unknown.

This put a more sensational aspect on the tragedy. Who could have murdered Paul Chadwick in that remote region? From every conceivable standpoint this problem was eagerly discussed. Everybody with whom he had business or social relations was canvassed for a theory, and as a result some startling stories came to the surface.

First and foremost was the assertion that Chadwick had gone to Kansas to upbraid his wife. It was established, so the newspapers said, that they had lived a cat and dog life and that he had frequently complained of moral lapses on her part. What more likely, then, that a high-strung man like Chadwick should in a moment of frenzy make an attack upon his wife?

But how came it that he was killed? Ah! Nothing could be more simple. She had wrested the pistol from him and used it in self-defense. Or perhaps the father and brother were not out feeding stock at the time the fatal shot was fired. They were more likely to have been present at the

preliminary quarrel between husband and wife and interposed to save the latter, and in the melee what more probable than that either father or son should kill the irate husband?

Mrs. Chadwick had taken the first opportunity, however, to declare that amicable relations had been restored between Chadwick and herself, and that he was unusually pleasant during his brief visit to the farm. But she seemed anxious that the suicide theory should be accepted. She repeated that Chadwick had acted very strangely of late and that she had feared more than once he would make away with himself. She instanced the fact of her going to Chicago to see him when he had just started to Kansas as proof of his oddity. She denied many of the stories of a scandalous nature that found ready publicity, and showed a sincere disposition to shield the memory of her dead husband from hostile attacks of any kind.

Still the public were not satisfied. Mrs. Chadwick revised her story of the shooting. Her last amendment was that she was lying on the couch and was suddenly alarmed by something pressing on her breast. To her intense dismay she saw her husband leaning over her with a pistol in his hand. With a frightened cry she pushed away his arm and the revolver went off, the bullet lodging in the ceiling. As she rushed dazed and bewildered from the room Paul turned the weapon upon himself and dropped to the floor.

Here, if this story was to be credited, was attempted murder and suicide. But why either if there was no feud

between husband and wife? A sudden attack of madness, maybe; but Chadwick had never shown the slightest sign of mental aberration. Yet, stay. Had not certain judges whispered mysteriously concerning the man's actions in court during the past year? It was recalled that he rambled in his argument of a certain case and that more than one member of the Chicago bar had expressed the opinion that Chadwick's mind was failing.

But by and by the uglier rumor that Paul Chadwick was the victim of his wife's anger pressed itself to the front. The woman's conduct since the tragedy was cruelly dissected. It was charged that she was at heart callous and spiteful; that she had been accused of misdeeds, and that her past would not bear close investigation. Among the dead man's effects was found a letter from her telling him to be sure to bring cartridges for the pistol when he visited Arcadia. That of itself was damnably significant.

Then her prolonged absences in Europe were subjected to cold-blooded analysis. It was urged that she had a rooted antipathy to the murdered man, for such he was now called, and might have deliberately lured him to Kansas to kill him. Motives were easy to find. Was not he largely insured in her favor? Would not a woman of that character prefer $20,000 cold cash to a husband she disliked, if not positively hated? Besides, it was patent now that their married life had never been a happy one. She was vain and pettish, discreet enough to keep up a show of affection in public, but making Chadwick's private life a miniature hades. Did she not show more real

feeling for her poodles than her husband? How could a woman who would sit for hours at a time combing their hair and decking them with fancy lace collars have much love for a man like Chadwick? Was not his ambition to shine in politics rather than to taste of calm domestic peace? Motives! Why, motives were as thick as flies in the shambles.

Moreover, the telegraph operator had done a little quiet investigating, and flashed in the additional sensation that the coroner's jury were of the mind that Chadwick was murdered. They were forced to that conclusion by significant facts. For instance, Colonel Chadwick's coat where the fatal bullet entered was not singed in the slightest degree. A number of experiments made with the coat convinced the suspicious jurors that had he shot himself the cloth would have been burned. It was utterly impossible for a man to so hold a pistol and inflict upon himself a wound similar to that from which Chadwick died without leaving powder marks or traces of burning on the coat.

So the discussion raged for several days. Meanwhile Paul Chadwick's body had been brought to his former home near Aurora and buried by old comrades with military honors.

Men who fought side by side with him during the war had been slow to take up with the suicide theory. They claimed that he was too brave a man to shoot himself under any stress of trouble. No; it was their firm belief that Chadwick had been murdered, and they demanded a strict inquiry into the circumstances of the tragedy.

Naturally the widow was closely watched. She had accompanied the body from Kansas and seemed overwhelmed with grief when the aged parents met her at the train and mingled their tears with hers. But soon it was bruited around that tears welled easily from her eyes, and that otherwise she was cold and passionless.

The coffin was placed in the little parlor of the old home while the preparations for interment were made. Mrs. Chadwick talked in a distant, repellant way of the sad end of her husband. She kept close watch and ward over the casket, which she refused to have opened to allow even the sorrow-stricken father and mother to take a farewell look at the face of their beloved son.

Her excuse was that dear Paul was so disfigured by the shot that it would pain them to see him. Then, he had not been embalmed, and the Kansas doctor said that he would be a ghastly sight by the time he reached the burial place. Besides, she had not the heart to have the coffin lid removed to expose those dear but mutilated features.

What good could it do anyhow? There were his coffined remains, and what earthly use was there for people vexing their souls by ocular proof of his frightful taking off?

The poor old father and mother gave in. They thought the widow's wishes should be respected rather than their desire to pay a last tribute to their dead son gratified. So the casket remained sealed as it came from Kansas, and no one had the sorrowful privilege of a last loving look before the remains of Paul Chadwick were lowered into their final resting place.

As soon as the funeral was over Mrs. Chadwick found that her callous attitude had deepened the feeling against her. At the time of her opposition to opening the casket no one remembered that the first report that Chadwick was shot through the head had been denied. When that fact was recalled it was said the man's face could not be disfigured if the fatal shot went to the heart, and it was at once charged that the widow had some weighty reason for not wishing the corpse to be viewed.

The rumors of foul play became louder and stronger. Column after column of sensational gossip was printed concerning the case. The bulk of the evidence seemed to be on the side of murder, and there was talk of exhuming the body and instituting a rigid inquiry when the widow veered round and, by a series of bold, heartless charges against the husband whom she had lately extolled as one of the kindest and dearest men on earth, changed entirely the tone of public sentiment and stopped short the threatened investigation of the tragic end of Paul Chadwick.

She now took the ground of a deeply injured woman. But for the baseless calumnies which were being hurled against her, she told the reporters, she would never have exposed the true character of Paul Chadwick. As those charges reflected on her own honor, even going to the extreme that she had murdered her husband, she was compelled to refute them. And she had abundant material at her command to prove her innocence and smirch the fair fame of Paul Chadwick.

First of all she declared that it was true her married

life had been unhappy, not through any fault of hers, but because of the insane jealousy of her husband. So bitter and violent was he at times that it was utterly impossible for her to live with him. On that account, therefore, and no other, she spent most of her time in Europe, where she was safe from his ebullitions of temper.

Several times he had beaten her and threatened to murder her. She was, in fact, in constant fear of her life. It was for safety that she had gone to her father's farm on returning last from France. She had not intended to resume marital relations with Chadwick, but he pleaded so hard that she consented to give him another trial.

The dire result of her leniency was known. He had tried to murder her, but an insane public wished now to ruin her life by charging that she, a poor innocent, long-suffering woman, whose honor was her dearest treasure, had killed Chadwick for the sake of the paltry money for which his life was insured.

She also hinted that there was the best of reasons for Paul Chadwick committing suicide. Not only had he abused her beyond the limit of endurance, but he had betrayed sacred trusts. It was easily demonstrable that his affairs were in a terrible shape ; that instead of being in good circumstances he was badly involved, and that to a man of his temperament, self-slaughter was the easiest means of preventing an exposure which would blast his name.

This stuff was devoured greedily by the public. Investigation showed that several packages of bonds had disappeared from the vault in Chadwick's office. His bank

account was overdrawn, and it was hinted that he had tried to borrow money on flimsy security prior to departing for Kansas.

Papers relating to property which had been intrusted to his safe keeping were missing. The impression gained ground that Paul Chadwick, hitherto regarded as the soul of honor, had cheated widows and orphans, deceived trusting clients, cruelly ill-treated his wife, and sought refuge in death from the penalties hovering over his head.

The case was dropped in disgust. Nobody wanted to probe the cesspool of dishonor into which Chadwick's reputation had sunk. Within a week from the time the widow undertook to defend herself people who formerly were proud of his acquaintance sniffed in contempt when his name was mentioned.

And Mrs. Chadwick, freed from all suspicion, whitewashed from even the shadow of guilt by the fickle public, was left to the devices of her own heart.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### LETTER TO AN ERRING WIFE.

I find it difficult to explain my own position during this storm of calumny. Duty to my dead friend demanded vigorous defense of his honor. From the first I discredited the story of his suicide. I knew that it was unlike him to take his own life. Self-slaughter was abhorrent to his well-trained mind. Not once, but a dozen times had I heard him say that it was the first resort of a coward. And Paul Chadwick had faced death too many times on the battle field, where true courage was needed, to be called a coward.

I was stupefied at first by the news of his death. It stunned my senses and unnerved my will. I could not realize that the man who had left me only a week ago with such dear hopes in his heart was dead. It seemed too cruelly horrible to be true.

When resolution returned I was first and foremost in demanding a rigorous investigation. I set detective machinery at work. I was determined to unravel the mystery and place the blame for the tragedy where it belonged. In the light of my knowledge of her character, the terrible theory that Mrs. Chadwick was a murderess

readily lodged itself in my mind. It filled me with a wild hope of revenge to learn that others, who were not cognizant of facts in my possession, shared my suspicion. I could have seen her mount the scaffold without a spark of pity for her fate.

But when the tempest was at its worst she sent me the following note from the friend's house in which she had sought shelter:

My Dear Mr. Mortimer: I am pained beyond measure to hear that even you, the old friend of my dear husband, are joining in the clamor against me. Cannot you try to think that even I, wicked as you may have thought me in the past, have some vestige of honor and womanliness left? Is it too much for you to believe that under no circumstances, under no provocation could I be driven to raise a hand against the life of my poor dead darling? Let me beseech you to suspend judgment for a while. I will not wrong your intelligence by pretending that there is not a mystery in this dreadful affair. To me it is in many respects incomprehensible. I have some facts to disclose when the proper time comes. The time cannot be long delayed. I shall not speak simply to shield myself, no matter how strong the suspicion or how vile the charges that may be hurled against my honor and truth. Until I can vindicate my husband as well as myself I shall preserve silence. Do me the favor to regard this note as strictly private. I shall soon be able to convince you that for even poor dear Paul's sake it is the best policy to refrain from stirring this matter more than is absolutely necessary for the present. Trust me in this, my dear Mr. Mortimer, and for Paul's sake believe me. Sincerely and sorrowfully yours, HELEN CHADWICK.

This strange epistle threw me into a plexus of doubt and uncertainty. You may say that I ought to have been thor-

oughly steeled against this woman's wiles and seen that it was simply intended to stop my inquiries and prevent my talking. But, as I have several times tried to show, I am weak and nerveless when I have most need to be bold and strong. It is a congenital defect that cannot be remedied.

I was at any rate fool enough, despite all the lessons of the past, to suspend operations when I should have been most active. I said I would trust this woman once more. I did so to my great sorrow and self-contempt. While I waited supinely for those promised developments that were to clear my friend's name, Mrs. Chadwick spattered it beyond hope of redemption with her wicked lies and calumnies.

It would have been madness then to interpose. Neither art nor courage nor wisdom could have turned the tide of public opinion back to a reasonable course. I encouraged myself to think that Providence would some day work a change, but meantime for my own satisfaction, and for another and nobler purpose should the result justify, I resumed my investigation.

What urged me to this step more than anything else was a letter which Mme. Dupierre had found, accidentally, she said, among some old papers in Colonel Chadwick's room. The landlady had behaved very well during the reign of the sensation. She could have added considerable zest to the talk about Mrs. Chadwick, but, acting on a hint I dropped as soon as the reporters came prying around our boarding-house, she was discreet to a praise-

worthy degree in giving reminiscences of her dead boarder.

The letter was addressed to his wife on the day after the Bogardus incident. Mme. Dupierre assured me nobody else had seen it. She thought it might be useful in the event, as she said, of proceedings being taken at any time against that beautiful devil, Mrs. Chadwick, who had once more fallen into her bad books. It was as follows:

Waverley Block, Chicago, Sept. 24, 188—.—My Poor Wife: May this find you well and strong enough to be brave in this hour of trial.

I want to write to you kindly, not severely. How dark the world is for both of us at this hour. Life presents nothing beyond duty. Every heart cord seems severed, and every line that bound me to the haven of happiness has been cut. I lived only for one life—my wife's—and from that life separation is now necessary. Henceforth and forever we can be husband and wife in name only. And when I write this, Helen, I place my hand at the throat of joy and hope and sunshine, of all that makes earth bright and life bearable. I pluck my heart from my bosom and crush it beneath my feet.

God help me! I cannot do otherwise. I am calm now, as I pen these lines, but at times I have been bordering on insanity. I lived but for one purpose. I built my hopes for one happiness, and yet everything is suddenly wrenched and wrecked without fault on my part. I have loved you with unselfish devotion—loved you as never wife was loved before, as no wife can ever be loved again. But how have you requited me?

My heart bleeds as I ask this question. Never since those joyous weeks of our honeymoon have you been a true wife to me. You kept your smiles and soft speeches for company purposes; for my own comfort you never had a care. You refused me your love and sympathy. You went away to give full bent to the

wicked desires of your heart. While I was bending all my strength and energies to win the wealth and position you pretended to desire, you were dancing gayly in Paris with a roue's arms around your waist.

Only to-day did I discover the source of those abominable anonymous letters that made me acquainted with your wrongdoing. Your Mr. Bogardus came to me yesterday with a blackmailing scheme, and acknowledged their authorship. Would to God he had stopped there. But he revealed himself as your former husband. I ought to have killed him, but my one aim was to guard your honor. I wrung a confession from him that saves your name and will enable you, should you so wish, to break away from this wicked alliance. God help you to do so, Helen!

Why you should once more put yourself into the power of that scoundrel is beyond my comprehension. To prefer him to your patient, devoted, sympathetic husband, who lived but for you, who never deceived you, who never knowingly wronged you, who loved you to idolatry, who had no happiness except in your presence, who wanted the world to adore you, and whose heart, body and soul and pride were all for you and you alone—God in heaven, girl, of what could you have been thinking?

I have been at death's door and you knew it. I have not only been weak in body, but drained in purse, that you might continue your "studies" in Europe. And thus to strike and disgrace me, thus to connive at my murder, for your plot ended with that most awful crime—O Helen, how had you the heart?

Had I known that I was repulsive to you, God knows I would never have forced my society upon you. I would have helped you to an honorable divorce. But to surrender yourself again to that wretch—to leave your husband for such a one—O Helen, where was your conscience, where your womanly pride, where the panoply of your wifely honor?

God help and pity you! God help us both!

I cannot speak of the future, poor girl, it is so dark. I cannot gaze beyond the present, which is blackness itself. But let me

urge you to strive for a higher life. Try, Helen, with all your soul to redeem yourself. I will help you financially all through life the best I can. Let me know of your needs, and do not hesitate to ask me for money. Study some plan for your future, and I will aid you all I can.

I never expect to see you again in this life. Our separation is absolute. We can never be reunited. But, O God! how my heart bleeds! Poor, weak, misguided, but not wicked, woman, good-by forever! Your sorrowing husband, PAUL CHADWICK.

My anger returned with tenfold force as I read these words. I could appreciate the anguish in which Paul penned them. With all her hideous faults before him, he strove to be kindly instead of severe. Out of the plenitude of his love and charity he treated this woman as weak and misguided instead of abominably wicked. He offered to shield her name, to aid her in the struggle for a better life. What more could a Christian gentleman do? Only a man of noble impulses and gentle heart could have written such a letter to an erring wife.

And yet this was the man, brave and chivalrous as a knight of old, whom the public press now reviled. It made my blood boil to think the good name of such a man as Paul Chadwick could be so foully wrecked by a woman's tongue.

No pity should be shown her now. I went to Simon Sharp, the detective who had been working on the case, and showed him the letter. Sharp, who at that time was thin and slender, with lank, bare cheeks, and shifting, uneasy eyes, had a natural gift for the unravelment of crime. He was suspicious of everybody, even of his own em-

ployes, and believed no man innocent unless there was absolutely no proof of his guilt. In disentangling domestic difficulties he had no equal. Judging from his own talk he had only to glance at the front door of a house to locate beyond a peradventure the closet where the family skeleton dangled its miserable bones.

Sharp had been deeply interested in the Chadwick mystery, and his eyes snapped viciously as he read the noble words of my friend. As he laid the letter down on his desk he said:

"Living and dead, Colonel Chadwick has been cruelly wronged. No one could have been more kind and considerate to an erring woman than this letter proves him to have been. The world would have forgiven him had he yielded to a tragic mood and sent her scurrying down the winds to prey at fortune. But, because of his leniency, because of his desire to protect this woman from further harm, she has the chance not only to murder him, but to blast his reputation."

"Then you think she killed him?" said I, pleased that a man of his sagacity should form the same opinion as myself.

"I have not the slightest doubt about it now," was the grim reply. "It is evident from this letter that he had knowledge of a plot to murder him. How he consented to compromise with her under such circumstances is hard for me to understand. But his letter shows that he had more charity and kindliness of heart than most men. Depend upon it, Mr. Mortimer, this fellow Bogardus was in

this thing in some way. Didn't you tell me he was a Kansas man?"

"Yes; he used to live at Topeka; it was there he married the woman under the name of Barton."

"Precisely, and it is there he went to help Mrs. Chadwick to put an end to your friend. I can see it all now. Bogardus, or Barton, reported the failure of his blackmailing scheme to his paramour. Funds were getting short with both of them. Chadwick admits in the letter that she has drained him. She is despairing, not only about the exposure of her gay life, but because she sees no way now to bleed her husband. Bogardus and she consult together after she returns to the United States. He may have gone back to Kansas after the colonel advised him to leave town. He is anxious for revenge. She bethinks that Chadwick has a large life policy in her favor. They decide to decoy him to Arcadia. He goes like a lamb and they kill him."

"Of course," I remarked, "I do not wish to take exception to this analysis, but you have overlooked the fact that Mrs. Chadwick arrived here the morning after her husband started for Kansas. He was not killed until after she had been back two days."

"Quite so, but that was part of the game to divert suspicion. It would be easy for her to pick Bogardus up as she returned and perfect the plan for the murder. I think if I were to go to Arcadia I could clear the matter up in very short space."

"Has she taken any steps to collect the insurance money?"

"She has been making inquiries of the agent as to what steps are necessary and has received but small encouragement."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. It appears there was an express clause in the policy that it should be void in the event of suicide. The agent said that the mysterious circumstances of the case militated against any prompt settlement. If the contention was maintained that Colonel Chadwick took his own life the policy was naturally void. If, on the other hand, it was contended that the man was murdered the company would have to be thoroughly satisfied on that score before paying the money over. You see how that fixes her?"

"Yes. It would be rather awkward for her if murder were proved."

"Awkward is no name for it if my theory is correct. The company would not pay the money to her, or I am very much mistaken."

"How did Mrs. Chadwick receive this information?"

"It seemed to stagger her for a moment, the agent told me. Then she said boldly: 'It was a clear case of suicide, and if, as you say, the policy is void under such circumstances I suppose I must bow to your decision.' And she left the office without another word."

"Ah! She does not want any further investigation even with the chance of getting the $20,000."

"No, sir. That is the reasonable conclusion. But it is not safe to bet on that woman's action. She has grit and tact, and she is apt to break out in some other direction

without warning. By the way, you have not told me how that letter came into your possession."

"It was handed to me by the landlady of the boarding-house."

"How did she get it?"

"She found it among some papers in Colonel Chadwick's room."

"That is strange. I wonder how it got there. It is not likely that Mrs. Chadwick would send it back to the colonel."

A new light dawned upon me.

"Perhaps he wrote it and never sent it," said I, "and in that event much of your speculation falls to the ground."

"Oh! no," remarked the detective, after a critical examination of the letter. "It has been through the mails. You can see the impress of two or three postoffice stamps, and it has been unfolded and refolded a great many times. Besides, it is not likely that a lawyer would write such a letter and keep it in his possession. If he repented writing it, he certainly would have destroyed it or placed it where it would not be likely to fall into strange hands. I think Mme. Dupierre is concealing something, and it will be well for me to see her."

"Do you wish to see her alone" I asked.

"Oh! no. This is a case where two heads, even though one be unprofessional, may prove better than one."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MME. DUPIERRE TELLS HER STORY.

On our way to the boarding-house I gave the detective an insight of the plot Helen Barton and Mme. Dupierre had formed to force me into marrying the latter. He was very much interested and seemed to attach a great deal of importance to it.

"You are to be congratulated upon your escape, Mr. Mortimer," was his earnest comment. "When two ordinary women put their heads together in a conspiracy of that nature they generally succeed. But these are not two ordinary women, and you do not know what fate you have missed. In view of your friend's sad end, you ought to be thankful that you are still on earth and a bachelor."

Naturally I agreed with this astute analyst of motives, and he went on to express surprise that I had continued an inmate of the house after I became aware of the plot.

"To tell you the truth," said I, "it was sheer laziness that kept me in the house. I do not like to change, and Mme. Dupierre has a way of looking after one's comfort that is very soothing to an indolent nature. After that little quarrel I imagined the danger had passed, and so

long as I could receive Mme. Dupierre's care and attention without marrying her I was content to stay. There has been no other attack. The landlady has been discretion itself since the plot was revealed.

"It is not my mission to tender advice to everybody," rejoined Sharp, screwing up his eyes into an expression of deep wariness, "but I think you are still taking desperate chances."

"In what respect?" asked I, a trifle alarmed by his manner.

"By remaining in the house with a woman who has the matrimonial bee buzzing in her bonnet. That is an insect especially dangerous to middle-aged bachelors. You have had a narrow escape of being stung by it, and my knowledge of the female mind leads me to believe that Mme. Dupierre attributes your stay in the house to a latent affection for her in your bosom. Oh, do not laugh! The woman is not yet born who ever relinquished her ambition to wed a particular man until he is dead. And even then I think she hopes to get him in the next world."

"Trust me, sir," was my complacent response, "not to put my neck in the halter with my eyes open. I thought you had reference to another danger. I am strictly on my guard with respect to the absurd matrimonal notions of Mme. Dupierre."

"Well," added the detective, sententiously, "to her that wills the way is seldom wanting, and security is often the parent of misery and misfortune."

To these bits of philosophy no answer was required and

none expected. We had arrived at the boarding-house and been shown into the parlor by the smiling housemaid. It was twenty minutes at least before Mme. Dupierre appeared. I could see at a glance that she had been fixing herself at the glass. There was a slight suspicion of rouge on her cheeks; her eyebrows were a shade darker than usual, and her headgear was a wonderful array of dothering sprays of some kind that suited her smiling countenance to a dot. She was dressed in black silk, and was in every respect a pleasing, substantial and comfortable-looking creature.

The detective's first sharp, quick glance was followed by a gaze of admiration. I heard him utter under his breath, "A mighty fine woman, too," as she entered and asked our pleasure. By previous arrangement I had to introduce the stranger in his real capacity. French women, the detective had explained, have a profound respect for officers of the law, and it is better to deal boldly and openly with them than to try to outwit them with the usual arts of professional cunning. Therefore I said:

"This is Mr. Sharp, a detective, Mme. Dupierre, who is engaged in the investigation of this unfortunate Chadwick affair. He thinks you may be able to throw light on some features that will help him materially. I know that you will give him all the aid in your power."

Mme. Dupierre turned pale when I made this explanation, and I could see the shrewd, twinkling eyes of the officer searching her face. But in a moment she rallied and said in her polite style:

"A detective! I shall have the great pleasure in telling the gentleman whatever I can!"

"I am sure of that," said my companion, pleasantly. "Mme. Dupierre can have nothing to conceal. Beautiful women are not all mischief-makers, Mr. Mortimer; some are as good as they are beautiful, and are never happy unless they are comforting the wretched and succoring the distressed."

Mme. Dupierre drank in this implied flattery with evident satisfaction. She was as pleased as Punch when she murmured:

"Oh, monsieur! you have the quick eye and the grand head. You understand the heart, sir, and it is with the great pleasure that I shall assist you to bring that beautiful wretch before the judge."

"You mean Mrs. Chadwick" quiried Sharp, quickly.

"Yes, sir, I have no more love for her; she has betrayed her husband, and should suffer the death. Ah! Mon Dieu! Why did I ever permit myself to be deceived by the black eyes and the sweet tongue? I will tell you everything, Mr. Detective, everything."

"I knew you would, madam," assented the officer, heartily. "Kindly tell me first how you became acquainted with her."

Mme. Dupierre settled herself in her chair as though she had a long and enjoyable task before her and rattled on as follows:

"I must go back two, three years, gentlemen. My bonnets I have made at the establishment of Mme. St. Just,

the Parisian milliner, of Wabash avenue, who always has the grand style and the skilled assistants. A very beautiful young woman take much pains to suit my taste. She had the quick, nimble fingers, the artistic eyes, the tact and the finesse which so charm the customer. I talk to her, and she tell me her story, oh! so sad, so disagreeable, that it make me the pain in my heart. She was young and had the ambition, but she made a misstep by marrying one big scoundrel, who illtreat and abuse her, and finally leave her to the cold, cold world. I tell her never despair; that in the sea there are good fish yet, and she sigh and say, 'Ah! madam has the good heart; some day she will be herself rewarded.' I say nonsense; that I am lonely since Jacques died, but I would never have another Jacques, so good and true and noble, so very honest and loving, who make of my life one bright, happy dream, and leave me so sad and sorrowful, ah! so many years ago!"

Here the emotional landlady was carried away by her recollections of Jacques' noble qualities, and bowed her head and wept a while. She found sympathy in our silence, and soon dried her eyes and proceeded:

"Well, we become what you call familiar. We tell each other our little secrets. We weep together, and we take courage for the future. She tell me that she seeks the divorce, and I say 'Ah! madam! I have the great lawyer, the Colonel Chadwick, stop with me; he would make you a divorce quick.' And then she sigh so deeply, and say 'Yes, I have seen the good Colonel Chadwick; he is very, very handsome. Is he also very rich, dear Mme. Dupierre?'

I say 'Yes, he is handsome and good and rich.' Then she say, 'How nice it would be to have such a splendid man for a husband!' And I say, 'It would be very, very beautiful, but the Colonel Chadwick, he is not the marrying man. He has one dear friend who stick to him closer than a wife.'"

Here the detective cast a quick glance in my direction, and I saw that he was enjoying the recital and satisfied with its course. As for myself, I felt my face getting warm as Mme. Dupierre went into those interesting details. But she was now rapt in her story and unconscious of any by-play.

"Then Mrs. Barton she snap her fingers and cry, 'A fig for the friend! What is the friend when a lovely woman wants a husband?' I said, 'Very true, Mme. Barton, but the Colonel Chadwick, he goes out in the society and sees many rich and many beautiful women, and he pass them by and say, 'No; I will be myself alone; I have my friend, and I have the good Mme. Dupierre, and they are comfort and happiness enough for me! No, madam; I think that it would be very difficult for you to what you call make up to the Colonel Chadwick!' She roll her eyes and swell the chest and say: 'Madam, look at me.' I look and say: 'Yes, very, very beautiful, but, parbleu, where is the money?' Then she laugh and cry. 'You do not understand, my dear madam. My face is my fortune. I will make your Colonel Chadwick love me!' 'Very well, madam,' say I; 'none but the beautiful deserve the brave, and I wish you the good luck!' 'Yes,' she say, 'but I want

your assistance, dear Mme. Dupierre.' 'Never!' I cry. 'I will not be of service to deprive my house of a good gentleman like the Colonel Chadwick. He has lived with me so many, many years. I do not wish to part with him.' 'But,' she say, 'you will not lose him. When I marry him we will both live with you, and how very nice that will be, dear Mme. Dupierre.' 'Yes,' say I, 'but the friend; he will never consent.' 'Nonsense,' she cry, 'if the worst should come to the worst, we will marry the friend to you, dear Mme. Dupierre.'"

"The devil!" cried I; "that was a nice way of arranging my affairs. Mme. Dupierre, I am astonished at you!"

"Pray let the lady proceed," said the detective, laughing. "Mme. Dupierre is merely telling you what Mrs. Barton proposed, not what she herself wished."

"I thank you, Mr. Detective," said the little French woman, giving him a grateful glance. "Mr. Mortimer is very, very sensitive, and he do not see that it was that wicked woman who was making the plan. But I will carve the long story short. I give her the advice and the ticket to the lecture. She say: 'I will hypnotize him. I make him die for me!' Next day she laugh and say: 'Ha! Ha! You wait, madam, and you will see.' Pretty soon I hear that she make the acquaintance of the Colonel Chadwick, and then again she tell me he is in love and she will marry him. 'And as for the friend,' she say, 'if you want him, I will make him marry you. I must have Paul for myself.'"

"And what did you say to that proposal?" queried Sharp in a mischievous tone.

"I said 'Ah! well, if the good God wishes, it may be so,' was the quaint response as the landlady looked slyly in my direction. I was feeling more uncomfortable than ever, but Sharp, who I firmly believe was having sport at my expense did not give me time to interpose.

"That was charmingly expressed, Mme. Dupierre," he said in his most suave manner. "You placed yourself entirely in the hands of heaven. A very commendable spirit, indeed, where a prospective husband is at stake. If heaven so willed it you were satisfied, eh, madam?"

I could contain myself no longer. The situation was getting unbearable.

"Oh, come," I cried impatiently, "we have had enough of this nonsense. Let us get down to business."

Mme. Dupierre threw me a glance of keen reproach and said, with some dignity:

"Do not forget, Mr. Mortimer, that it was not I who made the proposal. It was the wicked Mrs. Barton who said she would marry me to you. That is very, very different."

"I beg your pardon, Mme. Dupierre," was my testy response, "but that is past and gone and entirely beyond recall."

"Very well, monsieur," was her quiet response. "I have not the complaint to make. I have tried to do my duty. If I have failed it is not from the heart."

"That it is not," cried the officer, encouragingly; "now tell us what else happened."

"There is very little more to tell," resumed Mme. Du-

pierre, with a sigh. "She make the arrangements all herself. She try to make Mr. Mortimer fall in love, as you call it, with me, and she fail. She marry the colonel. She tire of him. She go away and she play the grande dame in Paris. She take the good colonel's money and she give it to the lover. She snap her fingers at the marriage vows. She say, 'Bah! What the devil do I want of a man that is old?' I know all this. Mme. Leon, my sister, she writes me about all the great times in Paris."

"And yet you skipped those interesting passages when you read the letters to Colonel Chadwick and myself," I observed, rather angrily.

"Well, what would you?" rejoined Mme. Dupierre, shrugging her ample shoulders. "All the mischief it was done. I could not make her to love the poor colonel."

"Certainly not," promptly agreed the detective. "Do you know of any other acts of wickedness which Mrs. Chadwick committed?"

"Ah, yes!" was the reply. "The lover, Mr. Bogardus, he call one evening before Colonel Chadwick got married. He make the great scene. He say she desert him and make of his life a tottering ruin. If she do not return he will shoot the Colonel Chadwick and kill her. He cannot live without her, but he will shoot her, he say. Then Mrs. Barton, she say: 'You are a big stupid! You make of me tired. Listen, George! I marry the Colonel Chadwick. I do not love him. I want his money. Now, George, be reasonable. I will love you always, but I must have the money. Perhaps some day we may get rid of this Colonel Chadwick."

"Great heavens!" cried I. "Why did you conceal this? All this misery would have been averted had you told me of that scene."

"Ah, Mr. Mortimer!" replied the Frenchwoman, mournfully, "it was not to be. I come to your room to tell you. Then Mrs. Barton come, and there is high talk and tears and nothing done. She make me weep and I could not break the spell."

"This refers to the interview I mentioned to you," I said to the detective, who nodded and remarked:

"It all fits in with our theory. Now tell me, madam, how you came in possession of this letter," producing the paper that Mme. Dupierre had given me in the morning.

"Ah, that letter," she responded, hesitating in a peculiar way, "that letter. Well, I will tell you, Mr. Detective. That letter came to me one day before the Colonel Chadwick was killed."

"Why," cried I, astonished at the woman's change of base, "you told me you found it among some papers in Colonel Chadwick's room."

She looked at me pityingly and said:

"Ah! Mr. Mortimer, but you are the friend, not the detective. I tell the detective everything."

"It came through the mail," continued the detective, "have you the envelope?"

"Yes, it is here," and Mrs. Dupierre drew an envelope from the bosom of her dress.

Sharp examined the paper and exclaimed:

"Just as I supposed. It is postmarked Arcadia. Was there any other inclosure besides this letter?"

"Yes, sir!" producing another paper from the same hiding place, "this little note."

"Dear Mme. Dupierre," read the detective, "I shall probably not see Colonel Chadwick any more. If anyone should ask you the reason, you can show them the enclosed letter, which I received in Paris and which nearly broke my heart. You will understand what it means. If any emergency should arrive, give it to Mr. Mortimer, and tell him that you found it in the colonel's room. I will write you again very soon. I know that you will oblige me in this, your unhappy friend, Helen Chadwick."

"Why have you kept this matter secret so long?" I inquired.

"I did not know what to do," said Mme. Dupierre earnestly. "I think at first that perhaps Mrs. Chadwick was playing what you call a game. When the bad stories were printed about the good colonel I think what shall I do, and I do nothing. Now I think this beautiful devil killed the colonel and wants to make of me a cat's-paw, and I say I will do what the little note says; I will give Mr. Mortimer the letter. He has the great brain and will know what to do."

"You will have to look out, Mr. Mortimer," commented the detective, slyly. "I do not think that Mme. Dupierre had any but an honest intention in keeping this matter secret so long."

"Thank you, Mr. Detective," said the landlady, curtseying.

"And I think this concludes my business for the day,"

he continued, rising and motioning me to accompany him. "I am really very much obliged, madam."

"You are very, very welcome," responded Mme. Dupierre in her usual effusive manner. "I wish very much, Mr. Detective, that you could make of that beautiful wretch a prisoner with the guillotine in front of her."

"All in good time, madam," said the detective; "all in good time."

## CHAPTER XV.

### TWO FORGED LETTERS.

"No doubt of her guilt lingers in my mind," said Sharp, confidently, as we walked downtown together. "The plot was even hatched before marriage, and she pursued it deliberately to the tragic climax. Sending that letter to Mme. Dupierre was a cunning move to add force to the suicide theory. You notice that the colonel admits that he was on the verge of insanity. She calculated that should any hubbub follow his death you would publish this significant letter to the world. Taken together with her final interview with you, after Chadwick had started for Kansas, it would have strengthened the opinion that he was in a condition of mind to kill himself. It was only when she found you indisposed to countenance that theory that she tricked you into silence, threw herself into the breach and blackened the dead man's character. She is bold, daring and plucky, and what a wonderful nerve she must have."

"And what of Mme. Dupierre," I queried. "Do you not think she has played a treacherous part throughout this whole miserable business? Do not her admissions to-day prove her a willing accomplice? I think it would be easy to prove her an accessory before the fact."

"My dear sir," answered the detective, smiling, "I can appreciate your attitude toward Mme. Dupierre, but her part was taken without knowledge of the ends this desperate widow had in view. Your landlady, in the first place, acted as almost any other lone woman would act who was anxious to secure a desirable husband. She was as clay in the hands of the wily Mrs. Barton. Women's motives or morals are not to be judged by the same standard as those of men. Mme. Dupierre may have acted foolishly, but she was honest enough, and would have spoiled the other's plans at the right moment but for Mrs. Barton's adroitness."

"Well," said I, not at all satisfied with his reasoning, but ready to drop that phase of the case, "what do you think should be done now?"

"I believe a trip to Arcadia would result in finding additional evidence to support the murder theory," was Sharp's reply. "But it would do no harm if we first saw the heart-broken widow and gave her a few broad hints of what is in the wind."

"But will not that put her on her guard?"

"It may and it may not. As I have said before, you cannot tell what a woman will do under a given set of circumstances. Mrs. Chadwick seems to have a masculine mastery of detail and moves to her ends with great skill and direction. But she is a woman, after all, and we cannot count on her probable action. Besides, I have a great desire to become acquainted with her. I may change my opinion when I see her."

This proposition did not meet my approval for several reasons. In the first place I had no wish to see Mrs. Chadwick in my present frame of mind. I had already mentally convicted her of the murder of my friend, and it did not seem right that I should try to inveigle her into damaging admissions, which I understood was the detective's object. Moreover, I was still of the opinion that it was not prudent to show our hand at this juncture. When I mentioned these and other scruples to Sharp he laughed and said:

"You are entirely too conscientious for the task you are engaged in, Mr. Mortimer. In the unravelment of mystery and the capture of criminals it is necessary to throw conscience and scruples to the winds. We have to fight the devil with fire. The public pays no regard to the means employed so long as the result is satisfactory. Think of your murdered friend, stifle your conscience and steel your heart to pity."

"But you surely don't want Mrs. Chadwick to know your real errand?" I protested.

"No, we will pursue a different line of tactics with her. She is not so disingenuous, according to all accounts, as your buxom landlady. You can introduce me as an agent of the insurance company, making a few necessary inquiries owing to the complications in the case."

"There is no danger of her guessing your real business?"

"None in the least. Besides, I am an agent of the insurance company. I have already been requested by the local manager to keep an eye on developments in the Chadwick mystery."

The upshot was that I led the way to No. —— Rush street, where Mrs. Chadwick was temporarily residing. We were ushered into a small reception-room, where Mrs. Chadwick joined us soon after I had sent up my card. She was dressed in deep mourning, but the healthy hue in her face and the sparkle in her big eyes did not bespeak any recent acquaintance with grief or woe. Neither did her manner denote the sorrowing widow. She was graciously calm and worldly, I thought, taking our visit as a matter of course and talking freely and coldly about the circumstances surrounding the tragedy.

It was only when the detective, whom I had introduced as Mr. Morgan, special agent of the insurance company, put two or three leading questions that Mrs. Chadwick seemed to steady herself for an ordeal of some kind.

"I have nothing to add to previous explanations," she said, in answer to a pointed query. "The evidence of suicide was clear and unmistakable. I told the jury that my husband had shot himself. I saw him do it. Why they should have returned an open verdict I am unable to understand, except it was for the purpose of annoying my father, who once had a quarrel with the coroner."

"Of course," said the detective, "the company can accept the popular decision that Colonel Chadwick committed suicide and refuse payment, but it wishes to avoid any legal complications. Had the coroner's jury returned an unequivocal verdict its position in the premises would be plain. But the open verdict leaves the cause of death in doubt."

"But how can that affect the company?" she quickly asked. "The policy was payable to me, and I shall make no further effort to secure payment."

"Pardon me," rejoined Sharp, "but may I ask if you were aware that there was a clause nullifying the policy in the event of suicide?"

"I was not," was her prompt response, "otherwise I should not have bothered the company at all. I am willing even now, so that this whole painful business may be dropped, to sign a release or any other document that the company thinks requisite to protect its interest. I want nothing that I am not strictly entitled to."

"But there is another way in which the company regards the case," said the astute officer; "it is not always advisable to enforce the suicide clause, especially where there is a reasonable doubt, such as indicated by the verdict of the coroner's jury in this case. Payment in such cases redounds to the credit of the company, brings in new business, and establishes confidence in it. We want to treat you as fairly as we can."

Mrs. Chadwick looked puzzled for a moment, and then said:

"Let me see if I catch your meaning. Does the company wish to make an exception in my case?"

"Yes, providing the question of doubt as to cause of death is plausible enough."

"And would there have to be further inquiry on that subject?" she continued in a guarded manner.

"Certainly, we should want some excuse for paying over

$20,000, which might, but for the incidental benefits to be derived from its payment, as well remain in the treasury."

"What additional inquiry would be necessary? What steps would the company take?" she asked nervously.

"We would send a man to Kansas to get evidence on the spot and would exhume the body for a post-mortem examination."

"Well, gentlemen," she responded, with a sudden flash of her eyes, "if that inquiry depends on my permission I shall not give it."

"What objection have you?"

"The objection of a woman who has already borne and suffered enough," said she, with a touch of anger. "I shall absolutely refuse my consent to any reopening of the case. Your company shall not advertise itself at the expense of my feelings."

"Very good, madam," said the detective. "We simply wanted to ascertain your position. New evidence has cropped up which adds force to the suicide theory, and we deemed it right that you should know how we stand."

"New evidence!" she exclaimed; "what can it be?"

I thought there was fear in her face as she asked this question. The detective noted the change and said significantly:

"A letter was received from Kansas the day before the tragedy which hinted of coming trouble."

"Indeed!" was the surprised rejoinder. "Who received it?"

"Mme. Dupierre."

"And who wrote it?"

"It purports to have been written and sent by yourself."

Mrs. Chadwick started at this statement, but she was herself again in a moment, and said steadily:

"There must be some grave mistake about that. I wrote no letter to Mme. Dupierre from Kansas."

The detective took the two letters from his pocketbook and selecting the note to the landlady handed it to Mrs. Chadwick. She read it slowly to herself and I could see that its terms affected her. She knit her brows together and bit her lips, it seemed to me, to restrain herself. Her voice was calm, however, when she asked:

"May I see the inclosure to which this missive refers?"

Sharp gave her Colonel Chadwick's letter and watched her keenly as she perused it. She was unquestionably agitated now. Her breath came hard and short and there was a deep flush on her face. As she turned the last page she sighed heavily and her eyes were moist as she said:

"All this is very strange and very painful to me, gentlemen. I seem to have some bitter enemy at work who is not satisfied even with the death of my husband. I did not write this note to Mme. Dupierre. I did not inclose that letter, which was not written by Colonel Chadwick, in any note addressed to Mme. Dupierre! They are both forgeries."

"Forgeries!" exclaimed Sharp, evidently astonished at the declaration. "Are you positive of that?"

"Certainly, sir. I know my own handwriting and cannot be deceived as to that of Colonel Chadwick."

She was perfectly self-possessed again and seemed to enjoy the plain discomfiture of the "agent," who said, as though he wished to shift the burden onto my shoulders:

"Why, Mr. Mortimer believed them genuine."

"Indeed!" she cried, turning upon me a look of scorn. "Then I begin to appreciate the situation. Mr. Mortimer was never friendly toward me. Perhaps he can enlighten you as to the origin of these letters."

Up to this point I had remained a silent witness of the scene, but flesh and blood could not stand this base insinuation. I believed the letters genuine and saw that unless checked the woman would twist even this interview to her advantage. Therefore I said:

"Mrs. Chadwick, for some reason or other you accuse me of a dishonorable, yes, an infamous, act. I believed those letters genuine. What possible motive could I have for the fabrication of such missives?"

"The one motive that has inspired you from the first mention of Colonel Chadwick's acquaintance with me," she responded slowly and scornfully; "that of jealousy and a desire to meddle disastrously with my affairs. You have a letter from me. Let this gentleman compare it with this one (holding up the note from Kansas). I will stand by his judgment."

I was too indignant to reply. I reached into my breast pocket and produced the letter Mrs. Chadwick sent me entreating patience during the storm of discussion raised during the tragedy. The detective examined the epistles with a magnifying glass he evidently carried with him

for such emergencies. He looked up with a puzzled air and said:

"To my unprofessional eye, madam, these letters appear to be written by different persons. The writing in the Dupierre note seems a little strained and stiff. I think it is the work of some one imitating the hand of the writer of this other letter."

"I was the writer of the letter to Mr. Mortimer," she said. "I can easily prove that fact."

She went to a small desk in the room and dashed off a few words on a sheet of paper and handed it to the agent, with the remark:

"You have a chance for another comparison."

It seemed to need only a glance at the two papers to convince Sharp that the woman spoke the truth in denying the authorship of the note to Mme. Dupierre. He turned to me and said:

"Mrs. Chadwick is perfectly right, Mr. Mortimer. She did not write that note from Kansas."

"Well," said I, puzzled in turn, "you can at least assure her that I had nothing whatever to do with it."

"Indeed!" ejaculated the woman with a sneer.

"I happen to know that to be a fact," said Sharp. "Mr. Mortimer had no knowledge of the existence of that note until it was produced in my presence by Mme. Dupierre this morning. As to the other letter, which you say was not written by your late husband, have you any writing with which it may be compared?"

"Oh, yes!" was her quick reply. "If you will excuse me a moment I will bring you some of his letters."

When she left the room the detective whispered:

"She is a deep one, and I am playing into her hands. She wrote the note to Mme. Dupierre, but did it slowly and stiffly, so that she might claim that it was a forgery."

Mrs. Chadwick returned before I had time to ascertain his reasons for this conclusion. She had a bundle of letters in her hand. Selecting one, she gave it to the detective, with the remark:

"This is the letter Colonel Chadwick wrote me on the 24th of September last, the date on which the forged note pretends to have been written."

"Why, its phraseology is identical with the letter sent to Mme. Dupierre from Kansas," said the detective in a tone of unmistakable surprise. "But I notice that the style of writing, while a close imitation of Colonel Chadwick's, has points of deviation which stamp it as a forgery."

"You had better make sure of that," said Mrs. Chadwick, handing him two or three more letters from the bundle. "These are all genuine letters from my husband. Even Mr. Mortimer will attest that fact."

Sharp used his glass again and then gave his decision:

"I am satisfied, my dear madam, that both the letters that came from Kansas are forgeries. They were written by two different persons. The one purporting to be in the handwriting of Colonel Chadwick was written by a man; the note signed with your name was written by a woman."

"Why, how are you able to determine that?" asked the widow with a slight start.

"Oh, that is simple enough," said the detective, smiling,

as he looked her full in the face. "Colonel Chadwick's handwriting is firm, but rather cramped, and owing to the exercise of certain muscles of the wrist it could only be imitated by a man. Few women have a chance to develop their muscles in a similar way to men, and they are rarely successful in copying the cramped, masculine style of writing. On the other hand, few men, no matter how effeminate they may be, are able to imitate the easy, running style taught girls in the public schools. Points of difference are always visible to the eye of an expert."

Mrs. Chadwick returned the detective's gaze with interest during this explanation. What was in her mind was evident from her response.

"That is deeply interesting," she said, rather quizzingly. "You talk like an expert."

"Oh," rejoined Sharp, with assumed carelessness, "in our business we have to acquire some knowledge of these things."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, we often have to compare signatures and such things. Can you imagine how anyone could get possession of this original letter of the colonel's so as to make a copy?"

"No," she answered, with a weary turn to her voice. "It must have been done in France. They have strange ways of getting at one's private affairs over there. If, as you say, the letters were written by a man and a woman, I must have two secret enemies instead of one."

"You do not believe that anyone would send that forged

letter to Kansas for the purpose of being mailed back to Chicago?" queried the detective.

"No, sir, I do not," was her reply. "I have no explanation to offer. It is all bewildering and perplexing. That I have enemies has been often impressed upon me of late, but who they are I am unable to decide. I apologize to Mr. Mortimer for regarding him with suspicion. You must know, gentlemen, that I have gone through a trying ordeal, and if I lose my temper at times, surely you can find an excuse for me. Tell the company that I am opposed to reopening this matter. I want rest and freedom from the terrible stories that have been set around. Let them send any form to insure them against trouble in the future, and I will sign it. And now, gentlemen, I am sure you will pardon me in closing the interview."

And with this long speech, delivered slowly and with an undertone of sorrow, we were dismissed.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### MORTIMER TURNS DETECTIVE.

When we left the house the detective complimented me for having kept my temper when Mrs. Chadwick hinted that I was the moving spirit of a conspiracy against her. He said the woman was acting and aching for an opportunity to fly into a passion.

"She does not really associate you with her troubles in any way," was his comment on the incident. "She is playing a part, and doing it very skillfully. She places you in the position of an enemy so as to mystify and annoy you. She wants to keep you inactive for some potent reason. I have an idea that Bogardus is working with her. He may have forged the letter. By the way, you mentioned the name of some French count; do you know anything about him?"

"Nothing beyond the fact that his name was connected with that of Mrs. Chadwick during her stay in Paris," I answered.

"Well, as I remarked before, she is deep and resourceful. I think she penetrated our real mission. We must give her a rest for a while, and work on another tack.

If, as I am firmly convinced, she has an accomplice, he will make his appearance sooner or later. It bothers me greatly that she should neglect a chance to get the insurance money. There must be some incriminating evidence about the corpse itself."

That thought had already occurred to me. Why should she be so averse to having the remains viewed before the funeral, and what objection was there now to a post-mortem examination? But I permitted the detective to continue his analysis of the recent interview.

"Unless Chadwick had a large sum of money upon his person," he said, "she must be short of funds. And yet her manner does not indicate any embarrassment of that character. Perhaps she has the missing bonds. She had an opportunity to ransack the vault when she returned from Kansas. It is not unlikely that her visit was timed for that very purpose. I do not believe that Chadwick made away with the securities as charged."

"Neither do I. Had he been pressed for money he would have called upon me. That story was one of her inventions to cover the tracks of the guilty persons."

"I still think," continued the detective, "that the key to the mystery is to be found in Arcadia. But this woman must not be lost sight of. Do you think you can spare the time to visit that region while I attend to the widow?"

Now, strange to say, this was exactly the proposition I was about to make myself. For some days I had been plagued with a desire to visit the scene of the tragedy. Something seemed to tell me that it was a duty I owed to

my dead friend. I had no idea that I could discover anything that would throw light upon the mystery. I simply felt that my mind would be easier were I to see the spot where Chadwick died, and talk to the people who had last seen and conversed with him. It would be a melancholy pilgrimage, I knew, but I could not repress the feeling that it was one I ought to make.

My recent association with this criminal expert, however, caused me to look upon the journey in another light. I was beginning to taste the pleasure of man hunting, and easily persuaded myself that I could detect and piece together conflicting testimony into a harmonious whole as well as the detective himself. Therefore, his suggestion that I should visit Arcadia jumped with my own notion, and I answered:

"I will take the time. I think, in view of recent discoveries, that I shall be able to run down the other conspirator in short order."

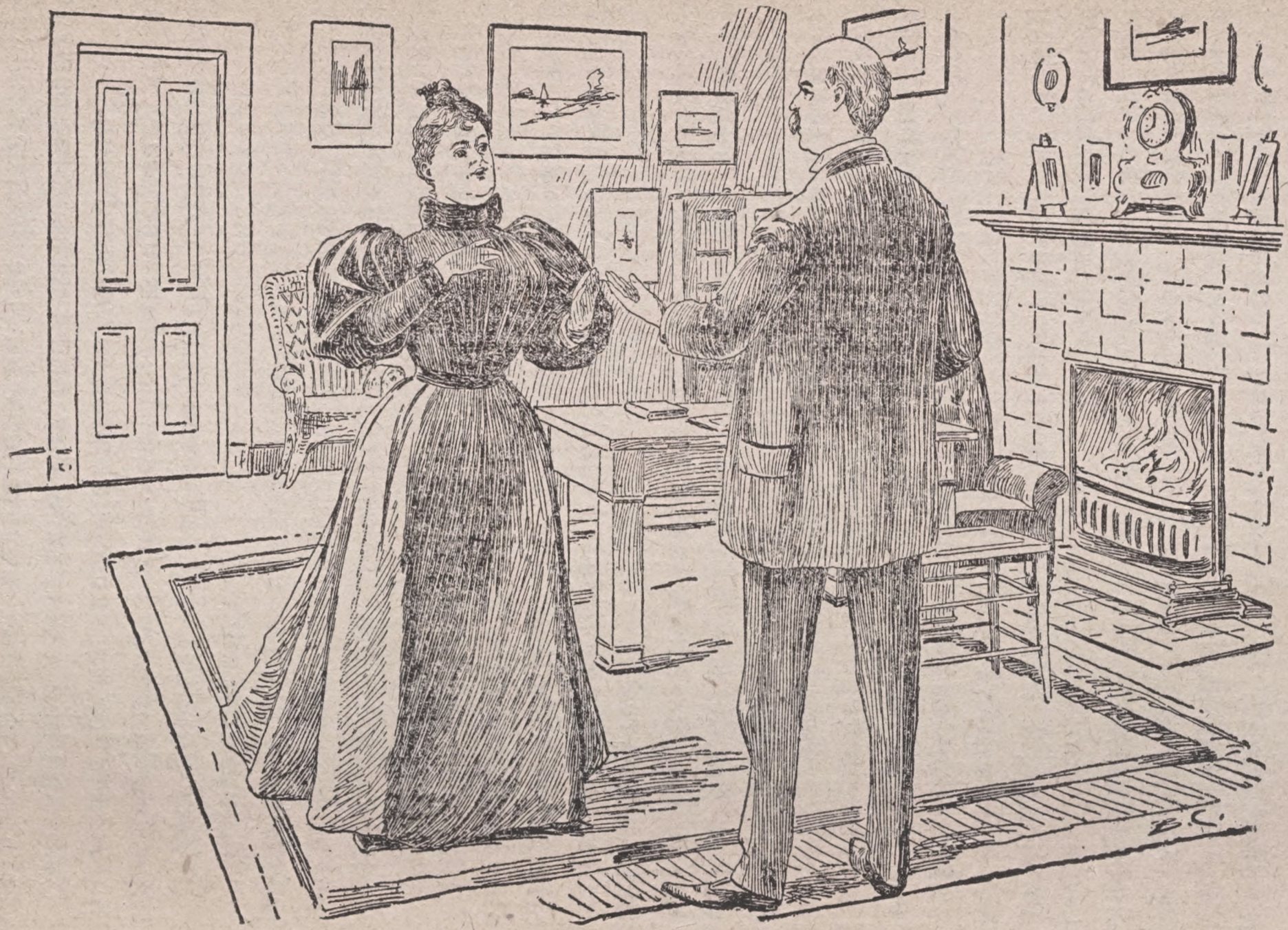
Sharp smiled at my confident tone, but merely added:

"If you will follow a few simple instructions that I shall give you, Mr. Mortimer, I have no doubt you can make clear certain points which are at present dark and perplexing. When can you start?"

"To-morrow night."

"Very good. I will call upon you this evening at your boarding-house and give you the hints necessary, in my judgment, for the successful issue of your mission."

We had had a very busy day, and I went home early to set about making preparations for the journey. Here



another surprise was awaiting me. While surveying the outfit I might need Mme. Dupierre came bustling into my room, crying:

"Mr. Mortimer, I am so glad you have arrived. Can you tell me where the good gentleman, the detective, can be found?"

"Yes," I answered, "but what is the meaning of this excitement, madam?"

"I have got one more little letter," said she, clutching her bosom wildly and speaking in sharp, tragic tones, "another link that will bind the beautiful devil in the prison cell!"

"Another letter!" I exclaimed, almost as excited as herself, "from whom?"

"Mrs. Chadwick! She is playing one great trick again. I wish to give it to the detective."

"Well, he will be here later on. I would like to see the letter, madam."

"Ah, no, Mr. Mortimer. I must wait and give to the man with the quick eye and large brain. I must make no more mistake, Mr. Mortimer. I will call again when the detective he is here."

While I was curious to learn the nature of this other letter, I knew it was no use trying to change the landlady's resolution to wait until Sharp arrived. That astute gentleman's flattery seemed to have worked havoc with her senses. It was plain that in future she would exchange confidence only with "the man with the quick eye and large brain."

But I had not long to wait for his appearance. I had just settled down for a post-prandial pipe when the housemaid announced his arrival. Mme. Dupierre was evidently on the lookout for him, since he had barely got inside my sitting-room door when she rapped and cried:

"May I come in, Mr. Mortimer, if you please?"

There was no time to give my visitor a hint of anything, but he did not look surprised as Mme. Dupierre, attired nattily and becomingly as before, sailed into the room and greeted him effusively.

"Ah! sir," she said airily, "I shall make of you my friend. I am on the watch. I have got another little letter. I have shown her to nobody. I keep her locked in my bosom until the great detective he has come."

"That is capital, madam," said Sharp approvingly.

"Voila, monsieur; she is here," cried the landlady, producing the document from its hiding place. "I know monsieur will be pleased."

"I am your devoted servant," responded the oily gentleman, as he took the envelope and examined it with a critical eye. "This is postmarked Badmansville, which I believe is two stations this side of Arcadia, and the handwriting is familiar. Of course" (drawing out the inclosure), " it is familiar; it is an interesting missive from our dear friend, Mrs. Chadwick. But stay! The signature is 'Helen Barton.' What does that mean"

"Perhaps you had better read the letter," said I, eager to learn its contents. "That was her name before she married Colonel Chadwick."

"Oh, yes! I remember," said the detective, "and here is what Mrs. Helen Barton has to say:

Badmansville, Kan., Jan. 29, 188—.—Mme. Josephine Dupierre, No. —— Michigan avenue, Chicago, Ill.—Dear Madam: About a month ago, at the request of my brother, I wrote a short note, which he said he would present to you personally by way of a joke. He afterward told me that he had mailed the letter to you. As the terms of the note referred to an inclosure to be given to a Mr. Mortimer, may I ask if there was such an inclosure, and whether it was duly delivered. I am somewhat anxious to learn this fact, since I have not seen my brother for several weeks, and hope that your reply will include some information concerning him. Yours faithfully, HELEN BARTON.

"Very interesting, indeed," commented Sharp. "I'm greatly obliged, Mme. Dupierre, for the wisdom you have shown in keeping this for our private information. We will attend to it. But not a whisper anywhere else, madam."

"You can trust me, Mr. Detective," said the landlady. "I will be as silent as the tomb. But what does it mean?"

"Patience, my dear madam," he replied, putting his fingers to his lips and shaking his head mysteriously. "Patience and silence. We must move slowly and cautiously, and we will spring the great sensation when it is least expected. Not a word, madam; not a word. We will write a reply together to-morrow, madam."

Mme. Dupierre was so pleased with this prospective cooperation that she allowed Sharp to bow her politely out of the room. After closing the door he listened a while

to make sure that she did not linger outside. Her retreating footsteps were audible enough, however, and the cunning gentleman returned to his seat with an air of supreme satisfaction.

"It does not do to trust them in everything," he remarked. "Mme. Dupierre is on our side undoubtedly, but the only thing a woman will not give away is something she does not know."

"But this Helen Barton letter," cried I impatiently. "What does that portend?"

"The success of your trip to Kansas," he said quietly. "Everything is playing into our hands."

"I must confess that to me it simply heightens the mystery," said I, dubiously.

"That is because you are as yet unaccustomed to your new line of work," was his somewhat sarcastic response. "When this letter was written in Chicago and sent to Badmansville to be remailed here, Mrs. Chadwick was uneasy as to the reception her former communication had met. She was unable to make out why you had not published the inclosure to substantiate the suicide theory. She expects to get a few hints through Mme. Dupierre as to your position. Why, Mr. Mortimer, that woman is a marvel; she is deeper than a well and sharper than a fox."

"But why does she sign herself 'Helen Barton?'"

"Oh, that is a slip of the pen. It is not at all uncommon when persons have changed their names once or twice during life."

"That seems plausible, but why send the letter from

Badmansville? Or why send it at all, when we know that Mrs. Chadwick is in Chicago?"

"You did well to say 'we know,' sir. It is not generally known that she is still in town. The newspapers have been quiet about her lately, and you may have noticed that she is avoiding old acquaintances. As to mailing the letter from Badmansville, it was done to avert suspicion. She would not want her people to know that she was engaged in any underhand work. Besides, unless I am very much off the scent, it is at Badmansville that we will get track of Bogardus. I think you have a very easy task before you."

"In what way?"

"My dear sir, instead of going direct to Arcadia, you will stop off at Badmansville. You will loaf around the postoffice. That is the general clearing-house of all gossip and local scandal in those rural districts. The day after you arrive a letter will be there addressed to 'Helen Barton.' Someone will call for it. Perhaps it may be Bogardus himself. At any rate, you will be in the postoffice at the time and cannot fail to get that all-important cue."

I saw the man's drift now, but his suggestion that Bogardus might call for the letter somewhat dismayed me. That swaggering individual would undoubtedly remember me and suspect my mission at once. He would either pick a quarrel or take some other desperate means to get me out of the neighborhood. I began to regret my ready agreement to act detective in this case. But I was not going to show the white feather. I had put my hand to the plow and would follow it to the end of the furrow.

"You make it plain enough now," I remarked. "How should I act my part? It will be necessary to have an excuse for going to that neighborhood. I understand the villagers of Southwestern Kansas are very inquisitive and somewhat excitable."

"I have thought of that. Take a rough suit of clothes and pretend to be an Illinois farmer looking for another location. That kind of guff always goes down, and it puts you in a fair way of getting the good-will of the people, for you will find lots of them anxious to sell in that region. Be as free and easy as you can, and strap a belt round your waist before you leave the train. I needn't add, I suppose, that you had better have one, or perhaps two, good pistols in your belt. It is the fashion out there at times to go heavily armed, and you will always find that good guns inspire respect."

As he rattled on with these and similar suggestions I grew less and less in love with my mission. Like most uninitiated persons, I had entertained rather an exalted view of the detective's calling. I always associated it with the highest class of brain work, and fancied the expert succeeding by reason of intellectual qualities superior to those of the criminal. But as I listened to my mentor, I saw that a low order of shrewdness, unmitigated gall and a total lack of conscience were the main qualities relied upon to command success.

On no account, he said, was I to reveal my identity. Suppose Bogardus was to recognize me? There was no danger of that. I would be disguised sufficiently as a

farmer to preclude even Mme. Dupierre guessing that I was other than the character assumed. Besides, after I left Badmansville, I could go to the Warmoth farm as a man in search of an agricultural investment, and pick up many facts that would be unattainable if I went as the friend of Colonel Chadwick.

He said it would be important to keep him informed of my progress by wire. As soon as I unraveled the "Helen Barton" business, for instance, I should send him all necessary particulars. Here again I learned other detective tricks.

"In some of those remote districts," he said, "telegraph operators are often leaky, and in others they have a multiplicity of duties to perform that renders them rather careless. Where the office is at the railroad depot there are usually a lot of loafers around who make it their business to find out what folks are telegraphing about, and it is sometimes easy to get a glimpse of the dispatches on the hook. For that reason you want to send messages in two sections, sending the second section first, and beginning each with some catch words, like 'Farm prospects brighter.' We will agree upon certain words to use where names are necessary, and the inquisitive chaps who want to ferret out the contents of your messages will be completely baffled."

After further talk of this kind Mr. Sharp rose to take his leave, with the remark:

"I will draw up a reply for Mme. Dupierre to send to 'Helen Barton,' Mr. Mortimer, and we will soon have those vile plotters enmeshed in the web of justice."

I observed that Mme. Dupierre and he conversed earnestly together in the hall before he departed, and presumed that Sharp was making an appointment for writing the joint letter to Badmansville. When I was leaving on the following night Mme. Dupierre remarked with more than customary fervor:

"I wish you the good luck, Mr. Mortimer, and ask of your forgiveness. I must not ask you to write to me. I shall hear the good news, I hope, from Mr. Sharp. Ah! what an eye and what a brain! He is the great, the agreeable, good man! Au revoir, Mr. Mortimer! Au revoir!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### AN EXCITING JOURNEY.

Under ordinary circumstances a railroad journey is wonderfully refreshing to me. It has the same effect as sleep, the season of all natures, upon the troubled mind, knitting up the raveled sleave of care, as Macbeth testified, and providing choice nourishment for life's future feast.

But as I now speeded westward over the iron rails I found neither the composure nor the consolation a palace car usually affords. I was beset by many fears and weird fancies. The rattle of the wheels seemed to find a responsive echo in my brain. All manner of pictures floated before my eyes, and strange voices whispered odd messages in my ears.

Sometimes it was a warning word that sent my mind on a wild chase after excuses for Mrs. Chadwick; at others it was a cunning phrase that conjured up Paul as I had seen him last, his eyes new-lighted with love for his erring wife. Then, again, would come a sentence recalling a cloud of doubt and suspicion into which not a ray of light penetrated.

While weak and wavering, as frequently admitted in these pages, I am neither nervous nor superstitious. I

tried to shake off these strange sensations, which I attributed largely to the unusual object of my journey, but they clung to me desperately. Not even the conviviality of the smoking-room could banish the clatter and confusion from my brain. I had to grit my teeth to maintain any degree of composure in the presence of my fellow passengers.

Nor was it any better when I sought my berth for the night. The voices became louder, the pictures more vivid, a blending of panorama and pandemonium, which drove sleep far from my pillow. I began to lose confidence in my reason, which seemed to be trembling at its base, and determined to seek the advice of a physician upon arriving at Kansas City, where I had to wait until evening to take a train to Badmansville.

A surprise was in store for me next morning when I reached the Coates hotel. Standing at the counter, as rosy and good-humored as ever, was Sam Bostwick. I imagined that his jaw dropped as he grasped my hand and looked into my face.

"Mortimer, old man," he cried in peculiar accents, "I am right glad to see you. But what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"Not exactly," I responded, rather alarmed by his manner. "But I have had a bad night on the cars, and I am a trifle out of sorts."

"Well, you look it," was his rejoinder, as he turned to the clerk and said: "Give my friend, Mr. Mortimer, the best room you have and we will go up to it right away."

Somehow or other I was willing that Bostwick should take me under his wing. As a general thing, I like to manage my own affairs, but after leaving the depot I felt out of sorts, as I said, and the sight of a friendly face was not unwelcome.

We were shown into a fine suite of apartments, and Bostwick, with a gentleness I had never suspected him to possess, induced me to lie down, while he gave some instructions for a bit of breakfast to be brought up, prefaced by one of those wonderful revivers of his which were the delight of a select coterie in the Fraternity Club. I felt better for his kindly concern, and, after partaking of a light repast, confessed that it had been my original intention to consult a doctor. In describing my condition of the previous night I told him of the recent developments in the Chadwick case and the nature of my mission to Kansas.

"It is lucky you met me," was his comment when I had finished the somewhat disjointed explanation. "You don't want a doctor. All you need is rest and legitimate restraint. You are passing through a mild stage of what the French call manie d'espionnage."

"Manie d'espionnage!" exclaimed I; "what new disease is that?"

"It isn't new," Bostwick responded gravely; "it is what may be Anglicized as detective tremens—a curious malady that is as apt to break out among bank presidents as bootblacks— and it is often fatal. Should a victim survive the first attack he is never the same man afterward. His

brain is peculiarly affected. He imagines that heaven intended him for a sleuth, and he is never content unless he is exercising his supposed faculty for detective operations in some way or other. There are several bad cases of the disease in Chicago. The victims are men of brains and wealth who, but for this unhappy malady, might rise to eminence in public affairs. I am truly glad, Mortimer, that I have caught you at the first stage of this complaint."

"It is not likely to prove fatal in my case," said I, laughing at the seriousness of my friend. "I begin to think I have had enough of sleuthing already."

"I am glad to hear you say so," was his response in the same manner. "A respectable business man like yourself, no matter how much he may be interested in any mystery, should never ally himself with a detective. That kind of a man is trained in an entirely different school, and his brain is hardened to the dissection of plots and counterplots, and does not stagger under a mountain of curious or bewildering complications. With you it is exactly the reverse. I venture to say, Mortimer, that in all your life before you never tried to connect motives with conduct in a domestic drama."

"Thank God!" said I fervently, "I have never had occasion."

"Just so. You have put your brain on a new track. Imagination has never, if you will pardon the remark, played a prominent part in your career; and now that it has been set agoing by this detective humbug it is simply running riot. Why, in a few days more those voices and brain pictures would have made you a raging maniac."

"Perhaps you are right," said I, shuddering at the suggestion.

"Right! Of course, I am right. You would make a fine show of yourself disguised as a farmer, with a couple of big pistols strapped around your waist. Farmers don't go about the country this time of year buying land. Besides, how could you impersonate a character you are unacquainted with? To use a vulgar phrase, every time you opened your mouth you would have put your foot in it."

I had to acknowledge that Bostwick was right in his line of criticism. I recalled with some mortification the look of contempt an Iowa farmer gave me once as I complimented him on his fine crop of barley. "Barley!" he exclaimed with a sort of disgust; "that's not barley; that's timothy grass."

"What excuse did this fellow Sharp give for not coming on this trip himself?" asked my friend.

"He wanted to pay close attention to the widow."

"The widow? Which one?"

"Mrs. Chadwick."

"Well, she's a match for him. But wasn't he rather impressed with the boarding-house keeper, Mortimer?"

My heart jumped peculiarly at this question. I remembered how gallant the fellow was in the presence of Mme. Dupierre, but then that was part of his stock in trade. He certainly could not be cultivating her for any other purpose than that professed.

"Of course," responded I, "the man insinuated himself into her good graces for professional reasons. He was

to meet her to draw up a reply to this 'Helen Barton' letter."

"I'm hazarding no prediction," said Bostwick, "but it looks rather odd that he should get you out to the most important end of the line while he kept the widow in sight. But I guess you will be all right now that I am with you. We won't start until to-morrow night."

"We!" exclaimed I. "Are you going to southwestern Kansas?"

"Certainly; I'm going as your guardian."

"Nonsense!"

"Not a bit of it. I am interested in that Chadwick mystery. A few bonds of mine are among the missing property and I think that the pair of us can get at the bottom facts."

"But that reply to Mrs. 'Helen Barton.' I want to be at Badmansville when it arrives."

"Well, we will be on the train that carries it. We could do nothing there but wait in the meantime, and it is mighty mean waiting in those outlandish villages. We will enjoy the ease and comfort of this capital hostelry another day. Besides, you need a rest to get entirely rid of the voices and pictures. Wire your man Sharp of your change of plans. He will keep you informed as to any sudden development in Chicago."

Bostwick had assumed an authoritative air that carried me along with him in spite of myself. Never before had I submitted to direction in the ordinary affairs of life. I always had a well-grounded notion that I was capable of

taking care of myself under any and all conditions, but now I welcomed a guiding hand and placed myself entirely under the tutelage of the Chicago clubman.

There seemed to be a special providence in his appearance at this time. Looking back now and smiling at my weakness, I am yet ready to confess that without Sam Bostwick's assistance in the troublesome times ahead I might have made a miserable failure of the trip and missed an opportunity to prove the majesty of God's eternal justice.

We passed the day pleasantly enough in Kansas City and I felt myself wonderfully improved in mind and spirits. Sharp did not send any startling news. The only message I received was to the effect:

"Corn advancing. Poodle still here. Letter to Henry will accompany you."

According to our code the first sentence meant nothing, and "poodle" and "Henry" meant widow and Badmansville, respectively. "Robert" was the cipher word for Arcadia. When I explained this to Bostwick he laughed and said:

"You are in the hands of a very ingenious gentleman, old fellow, but we won't follow his instructions to the letter."

Next morning the newspapers were full of a terrible county seat war in the very region for which we were bound. Two armed bands, one representing Badmansville and the other Arcadia, had met in deadly conflict in a canyon between the rival towns. The sheriff of the county had been killed; the life of the judge of the district

was threatened; flying fights were in progress; all the citizens were under arms, and two companies of state militia had been dispatched to the scene.

Special editions giving further details were printed all day long. According to the accounts wired from the seat of carnage, nothing so bloody or deplorable had occurred since the civil war. Several counties were involved in the outbreak, and armed men belonging to oath-bound associations were massing at various quarters to march upon and destroy both Badmansville and Arcadia. Excited citizens were wiring the governor of Kansas to send the whole militia force of the state to quell the riotous mobs, while members of the mobs sent in threats that they would wipe out the militia if they dared to invade the neighborhood. In the minds of the excited reporters, who were already on the spot, it was the wildest and bloodiest time in the world's existence.

Bostwick and I read every item of the sensational dispatches with avidity. I thought it advisable to postpone our journey until the region quieted down. We could make no progress with our inquiries while everybody was either evading murderous missiles or trying to shoot somebody else. But my friend, who had done business in that section when it was nursing a sugar industry, said it would be better to adhere to our original programme.

"I know those people," he remarked; "there is undoubtedly some excitement down there, but it is nothing like what the reporters describe. I guess loco is at the bottom of it. Whenever prohibiton whisky gives out some ornery

cuss makes a decoction from the loco weed, which sets them crazy. They stamp and fume and imagine all manner of murderous things, while at the same time most of them are afraid of their own shadows. Indeed, I think the outbreak comes very opportunely for our purpose. We may pick bits of truth from the victims of loco madness that will help our investigation."

Therefore, we took the train for Badmansville in the evening. The agent regarded us with commiseration when we bought our tickets, and we were objects of curious interest to the conductor, Pullman porter and brakemen, who regaled us at intervals with hair-raising stories of previous county seat wars in the vicinity of No Man's Land. They were worrying about our mission to that forlorn section in these bloody times, and (so that they should spread the information where it might do good) Bostwick carelessly intimated that we were Chicago business men on a prospecting tour.

"It's no use masquerading as your friend Sharp wanted you to do." he explained to me. "As Chicago business men we can have all the latitude we need in probing and prying, and we can bring up Chadwick's name naturally and easily when occasion requires. But, Mortimer, what a lot of trouble you have escaped! Just fancy yourself landing at Badmansville during the present state of public opinion with a couple of big pistols strapped around your waist. Why, you might have been dangling from a telegraph pole now."

It wasn't a pleasant reminder of what might have hap-

pened, but I recognized its force, and thanked Bostwick for having saved me from an untimely end.

The journey was an unusually tedious one. By daybreak we had passed most of the customary landmarks of civilization, and were running through a sparsely populated country, whose wintry aspect was anything but cheering. Patches of brown, bare soil peeped through the thin mantle of snow, giving scant assurance of summer verdure, and explaining in part the desolate appearance of the ragged hamlets along the road.

At every depot there was a crowd to hail the arrival of the train. It was a picturesque, but pain-giving gathering, as a rule. The men were dirty and poorly clad, the women lank, forlorn and frowsy, the children tame and listless. They watched the travelers with dull, weary eyes, and seemed as though hope and ambition had been forever crushed in their hearts.

News of warfare further to the west had infused no spirit into them. One could imagine them believing there was nothing in the world worth fighting or struggling for. Only when the train moved on was there any sign of active human interest. Each member of the crowd sighed as though some tender tie was broken. They mourned because another day had come and gone, leaving them still languid and despondent in that valley of desolation. Their manner indicated that a trip anywhere either in or out of the world would be preferable to the daily routine of dullness and decay.

As we neared Badmansville in the evening exciting

echoes from the battlefield reached us. Three companies of militia were under arms and martial law had been declared in both towns. There had been several affrays, running fights by mounted men, and blood was flowing freely in every direction. The conductor and brakemen seemed to delight in bringing us each startling story, and watched to see if our faces blanched as they exaggerated in regular western style. But their aim was too apparent to affect either Bostwick or myself. We kept calm and cool amid all the wild alarms.

Darkness had set in when Badmansville was called, and it was bitter cold. On the station platform were a dozen or more men armed with Winchester rifles, who seemed to be particularly interested in our arrival. They followed us into the little waiting-room and were disposed to be rudely demonstrative as I read a dispatch handed me by the operator, who was also the station master. The message read:

Corn bully. Poodle started for Robert last night. Be watchful and bold. SIMON SHARP.

At least twenty pairs of eyes watched me as I handed this innocent message to Bostwick, who nodded as he saw its import. No sooner had I placed the message in my breast pocket, however, than a rough-looking chap stepped up and said:

"So you have to be watchful and bold, have you? Well, I guess not in this neighborhood. What's your business here, anyhow?"

I was about to make a mild reply when Bostwick interposed and said sternly:

"Our business is our business and not yours. Stand aside."

This bold play met with a murmur of approval from the rest of the crowd in the station. They were an uncouth, bewhiskered set, and they handled their rifles as though they were not averse to using them. But Bostwick knew the people he had to deal with, and continued his bluster:

"Apparently some one has read the message of my friend before it was delivered to him," he said. "That is a breach of service rules which must be inquired into. I may tell you, however, that we are Chicago men and have no interest one way or another in this neighborhood quarrel. Now if there is anybody here who has authority to question our movements let him step forward."

The men whispered among themselves a few moments, and I saw one slip out of the room. We were told that we had been suspected of being Arcadian sympathizers, but for the present we could dispose of ourselves as we saw fit.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Bostwick, in his most sarcastic tone, "perhaps some of you will show us the way to a hotel."

At this there was a roar of laughter.

"Hotel!" cried one; "there ain't one within twenty miles."

"Then a restaurant," said Bostwick, "or a boarding-house."

"Nary one. But you'll find a lodging, sure enough. Come along with me."

We picked up our gripsack to follow our self-appointed guide. The others were grinning when we stepped from the waiting-room into the darkness. Barely two steps had been traversed before a stern voice cried:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Directly in front of us was a militiaman barring our way with a bayoneted rifle.

"Friends!" cried Bostwick, as soon as he caught sight of the glittering steel.

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign!" was the next command.

Bostwick dragged me toward the sentry whispering: "It's all right; we better go to the guardhouse than remain loose among these fellows."

To the sentry he said:

"That's perfectly correct, my friend; take us to the officer of the guard."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### ANOTHER HELEN BARTON.

We were led down what appeared to be a straggling street to a dimly lighted barn, where another sentinel was posted. This was military headquarters, and it was only after a formal parley between the stern militiamen that we were admitted to the presence of the commander-in-chief.

This officer, a short, thick-set man, with shaggy eyebrows and heavy black mustache, was at the remote end of the barn in earnest consultation with another man in uniform, and two civilians with Winchesters in their hands. There was a surprised movement as we entered. Our escort marched us up to the commander and explained our presence with military directness. We were suspects, he said, and ignorant of the password, and had requested to be brought before the officer of the guard.

Here Bostwick's readiness again did us good service. Before General Williams could put a question to us my friend advanced toward him with a confident air and said something which sounded like:

"How old is your mother?"

To my great surprise the general sprang toward Bost-

wick on hearing this apparently idiotic question and muttered something like:

"One hundred and fifty-seven, Deuteronomy."

Then the officer drew my companion to one side and they talked together in a low tone for a few moments. I afterward learned that this peculiar performance was part of the challenging ceremony of a secret organization that is jealous of the liberties and prerogatives of its members. Bostwick's good standing in the order came in handy at this juncture, for at the close of the brief conference General Williams said with a pleasant laugh:

"It's the fortune of war, Mr. Bostwick. I am sorry that you and your friend have been subject to any annoyance, but you did the very best possible thing in coming to my headquarters. There is not a hotel or boarding-house in this benighted town. This" (glancing around the bare barn with rather an unmilitary shudder) "is the best accommodation the place affords for strangers, and such as it is you are welcome to share with me."

Bostwick thanked the officer and asked the privilege of an escort to the postoffice, where, he said, we were expecting mail. A militiaman was detailed to accompany us. We did not need him for protection, but to act as guide and spare us further trouble with the vigilant sentries at every corner. The postoffice was in a small printing office about one hundred yards away. An active, natty little man was behind the glass partition distributing the mail as we entered. He had a big pistol in his belt, and every one of the score of men watching his operations was armed.

Our entrance caused a buzz of excitement. We could hear some of the fellows whispering that we were the suspected Arcadians and were under arrest. Neither Bostwick nor myself paid any attention to their grim looks or muttered menaces. We kept our eyes open for the person who should call for a letter for Helen Barton.

We did not remain long in suspense. Just as the dapper little postmaster had declared himself ready for business, the door opened and a neatly dressed woman of about thirty stepped up to the wicket. She had a sweet, winsome face and carried herself with a grace and modesty out of keeping with the rough surroundings.

"It's here at last," cried the postmaster, as though the young woman had been disappointed on previous calls, "only they have written 'Mrs.' instead of 'Miss Helen Barton.' I suppose it must be for you."

Both Bostwick and myself started when we heard the postmaster's speech. Neither of us was prepared to find a real Helen Barton here, but there stood a woman, evidently well known and respected, called by that name, saying in answer to the implied doubt:

"Oh! yes. I'm the only Helen Barton in this section."

Miss Barton hurried away after obtaining her letter and, on ascertaining that there was no mail for us, we went back to headquarters. The consultation interrupted by our arrival was still in progress, and we took advantage of the opportunity to discuss this new turn to the Chadwick mystery.

"This discovery of Helen Barton," I said, "rather com-

plicates matters. Sharp was confident, I think, that George Bogardus would apply for the letter. I confess that I have no theory to work upon now, except that it is curious that the handwriting of this Helen Barton should so closely resemble that of Mrs. Chadwick."

"It is a good thing," remarked Bostwick, "that we have arrived at a point where theories have to be abandoned. I am no great believer in detective theories. We have now a condition and not a theory to confront, as Grover once put it. We have Helen Barton located. It will be a simple matter now to ascertain the reason for her correspondence with Mme. Dupierre."

"Indeed!" exclaimed I; "how are we to proceed?"

"Not in the tortuous manner in which Simon Sharp and his pupils would proceed," said my friend ironically. "We will ask her the question plainly to-morrow after we ascertain her status in this wild community."

"I suppose it is little use bothering our heads about this new phase of affairs until after that interview," was my response.

"No use in the world, old fellow. We had better make friends with our host the general and adapt ourselves to this uncomfortable situation."

After dismissing the civilians, who cast upon us repeated glances of distrust, General Williams drew up a chair near the big base-burner stove in the center of the barn, where we were already seated, and chatted about the trouble. He agreed with Bostwick that there was more cry than wool astir, and that calling out troops to quell a county-seat squabble was a foolish proceeding.

"It has already led to the impression that a civil war is in progress," he said, "and has stirred up feelings that are much better dormant. The men who have just left are responsible for most of the fuss. They have been trying to make me believe that one hundred or two hundred men, armed with Winchesters, are going to descend upon Badmansville to-night and sweep us off the face of the earth. I have told them to go home and sleep peacefully —that our boys will take care of the town, which will stand to-morrow morning exactly where it stands now, and that not a shot will have to be fired in self-defense. They have gone to the depot to wire the governor that I am not equal to the emergency. They want more troops and a more determined commander."

"Of course," said I, "you have taken all necessary precautions, General. There is no danger of a surprise?"

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Mortimer," responded the general, laughing. "The town is under martial law. We have pickets stationed at all prominent points, and the boys are ready to respond to the call of duty with the utmost alacrity. Meantime, we will see what we can manage in the way of supper."

General Williams then sent an orderly to the grocery store to get whatever delicacies were in stock.

"This grocer is one of the typical characters of the neighborhood," explained the general. "He bears a brave name, Custer, and he wears heavy pistols, and talks big about his ability to use them. He was in the first melee as a representative of Badmansville. As soon as

the firing began he dropped his rifle, turned tail and fled. His excuse was that he did not want to be present at another Custer massacre. Another of the warriors sprained his ankle during the rapid retreat. He crouched among the bushes in the hope of being overlooked by the pursuers, who, I thoroughly believe, were as scared as the pursued, and did not follow after the first deadly volley. This man claims to have heard cries of 'Give no quarter, boys; death to every fellow from Badmansville.' Once he raised his head and saw a black object towering above him. Prone went his face to the earth again, and he quivered in agony as he waited for his death wound. Minutes passed into hours, however, and not a shot rang out in the air. He ventured to look up again, and lo! and behold, the fearful threatening object was his own familiar black hat nestling quietly on a piece of brush close to his head. Oh! I tell you, these county seat fighters are terrors when they get on the warpath. If they would only keep their wild yarns to themselves, not much harm would accrue anywhere, but they have such an impressive style of discussing and describing their own bravery that they impose upon those innocent newspaper chaps from Topeka, who loosen the reins of their imagination and give minute details of bloody battles that never occur. I don't blame the boys, though. They are writing on space, and there seems to be a ready demand for this sensational stuff in the East."

All the orderly could scrape up at Custer's was a few bottles of beer, a paper of crackers, two boxes of ancient sardines and a pound of dry cheese. We tackled this fru-

gal fare with good appetites, however, Bostwick slyly calling my attention to his remark about enjoying the comfort of the Coates hotel. We smoked and chatted awhile after supper, and then decided to turn in for the night. Our preparations were simple enough. We scattered a bale of hay on the floor, rolled up our overcoats for pillows, got a piece of tent canvas for covering, and then laid down to rest.

It was a dreadfully cold night, as I have said, and the big stove barely took the chill off the raw atmosphere of the barn. But despite the warlike surroundings, the dread of being awakened to assist in a bloody massacre, and the new development in the Chadwick mystery, I neither heard voices nor saw pictures, but slept as soundly and as comfortably as I ever did on the soft mattresses and downy pillows of Mme. Dupierre's boarding-house.

In the morning we had another taste of the discomforts of campaigning in this desolate region. Reveille sounded at 6:30 and we turned out with the brave militia boys. There were no toilet luxuries at our command. We each took a turn at the town pump, breaking away the ice for the purpose, and shivered in the frosty air as we dried ourselves with pocket handkerchiefs. But the military coffee was hot and strong, and dispensed with hearty hospitality, and Bostwick and I were in pretty fair spirits when we finished the humble breakfast and turned to our immediate business.

Thanks to the good offices of General Williams, the natives no longer regarded us with suspicion. They had

been shown that we were business men from Chicago investigating the prospects for reviving the sugar industry, and had no sympathy with Arcadia or any other section inimical to the interests of Badmansville. We had no difficulty in pushing a few cautious inquiries; in fact, now that the blustering citizens were sure we were not enemies, they were a trifle too ready to talk on some topics. It was not long before we ascertained that Helen Barton was the schoolma'am of the village, and a woman who stood high in the esteem of her neignbors. She was an orphan, but had a brother, George Barton, who was in Badmansville a few weeks ago. George did not seem to be in good favor.

"He was uppish and town-like," remarked a grizzly old farmer, who had a rifle slung on his shoulder, "and we did hear as how he was one of them fast sports. He hain't been round lately. Last time as we seen him he was riding toward Arcady. That was before this here trouble. Mebbe he's skeered to come back now."

When we compared notes I found that Bostwick was of the same opinion as myself—that George Barton was no other than Bogardus, and the brother of the attractive little school-ma'am. There might be something in Sharp's theory after all.

Speculation was, however, idle at this stage of the inquiry. We decided to interview Helen Barton. Owing to the excited state of the community, school was closed, and we found the teacher at home in a small cottage, which, though poorly furnished, gave evidence of neat and

careful house-keeping. The little sitting-room into which we were shown by Miss Barton herself was as spick and span as the quarter deck of a man-of-war. There was a parlor organ in one corner, a well-stocked book-case in another and the walls were garnished with pictures from the Christmas numbers of illustrated papers.

While surprised at our call, Miss Barton showed none of the eager curiosity or anxiety usually associated with bucolic manners. She had a refined, winsome face, with soft, blue eyes and dimpled chin, and a mass of golden-brown hair coiled gracefully about her well-poised head. Her figure was neat and trim, and when she spoke her language was well-chosen and her voice had a low and agreeable tone. It was a pleasure, indeed, as I afterward remarked to Bostwick, to meet such a sweet embodiment of grace and refinement in that uncouth village.

"We are from Chicago, Miss Barton," began Bostwick, whom I had asked to act as spokesman, "where we both had the acquaintance of George Barton. Hearing that he had a sister in this neighborhood, we have presumed to call and ascertain where he is to be found at this time."

"George was here five weeks ago," she responded with a sigh, "but I have no idea of his present whereabouts. When he left he said he was going to Topeka, and that he would write as soon as he settled some business that was bothering him."

"Topeka!" exclaimed Bostwick. "How unfortunate. We have just passed through that city and might have stopped off to see him had we known he was there. By

the way, have you a photograph of your brother, Miss Barton?"

"Yes," promptly answered the little schoolma'am, taking an old-fashioned album from the center table, and, turning the leaves rapidly. "This is one George had taken in Paris last spring."

She pointed to an excellent picture of Bogardus, dressed in the height of French fashion, with his long mustache beautifully curled and a cigarette poised carelessly in his right hand.

Bostwick's face set hard as he proceeded with his questions.

"Pardon me, Miss Barton, if I seem inquisitive," he said, "but do you remember writing a letter to Mme. Dupierre, of Chicago, several weeks ago in which you mentioned the names of Colonel Chadwick and Mr. Mortimer?"

"I wrote a letter," she said, slowly, "at George's dictation in which those names occurred. Why?"

"This is the Mr. Mortimer mentioned therein," continued Bostwick, gravely indicating me.

"Ah! indeed," she remarked, with a smile. "I had a letter from Mme. Dupierre last night, in which she said Mr. Mortimer would probably do me the honor of calling upon me soon. I am glad to meet you, sir."

I could see that Bostwick was puzzled, and as for myself, I could make nothing out of Miss Barton's demeanor, which was calmly innocent and polite.

"Why did you sign that first letter to Mme. Dupierre 'Helen Chadwick?'" asked my companion.

"I did not sign it 'Helen Chadwick,'" was her surprised reply. "I signed my own name."

"But the letter received by Mme. Dupierre was signed 'Helen Chadwick.'"

"Then it was not written by me."

I took the letter referred to from my pocket-book and asked Miss Barton if it were the one she had written.

"Yes," she promptly answered, after a brief examination; "but I signed it 'Helen Barton.' The signature must have been changed after it left my hands. But, tell me, gentlemen," she continued, rather nervously, it appeared to me, "what this inquiry means. You speak as though some grave wrong has been done. I beg of you to be frank with me; I have nothing to conceal, and plain-speaking may help us to understand what is now obscure."

Thus appealed to, Bostwick entered into a short statement of the Chadwick case, giving at the same time the prior history of Mrs. Chadwick. I could see that the story was new to Miss Barton. She was very much agitated during the recital, and at its close she in turn told us all about the letter writing.

"I knew George had been married," she began, "but did not know to whom, nor was I aware that he was divorced. I am sorry that I was not more in my brother's confidence. I knew Helen Warmoth as a schoolgirl; in fact, we were taught at the same school in Arcadia, where my parents resided until their death a few years ago. Had George been straightforward with me, perhaps a great deal of mischief might have been spared, for, although wild and

reckless, he has a great respect for his sister, and I think I could have had some influence on his career. When he came here last he spoke of going abroad again for a long time. He wanted to see me again, he said, to arrange for a more regular correspondence between us. It was right and proper, he declared, that we should not lose sight of one another, as we had done in the past. While talking about writing, he said: 'Nelly, you write almost identically the same hand as a friend of mine in Chicago. Let me dictate a letter to you. I will show it to her when I return.' I had no thought of anything wrong, and wrote that letter, Mr. Mortimer, at his dictation. He seemed very pleased with it, and told me the next day that he had mailed it to Mme. Dupierre, who would be very much amused by it. Not having heard from him since he left here two or three days after he said the letter was mailed, I wrote a note of inquiry to Mme. Dupierre and received an answer last night. That may look somewhat suspicious, but the fact is, gentlemen, I was a little uneasy and thought George might have some other object than a wish to amuse this Mme. Dupierre. As to the inclosure, I never saw it, and know nothing of its contents except what you have told me. I never even heard of the Chadwick suicide. But that is not strange. There is not much communication between Arcadia and this place, and no mention of the affair was made in our weekly newspaper. Tell me, gentlemen, what you think. Do you believe that my brother is mixed up in the matter at all?"

"We hardly know what to think," responded Bostwick,

with a quick glance in my direction; "the affair is as mysterious as ever, but your frank statement, for which we cannot thank you too much, has removed one stumbling block from our path. We will push the inquiry as far as Arcadia, and let you know the result. Meantime, madam, we may rely upon you not to give the matter any publicity. Our visit to you may be explained on the score that we are friends of your brother."

"I shall certainly preserve silence," said the little schoolma'am, as we rose to leave. "But, remember, gentlemen, that I, too, have a deep interest in the matter now, and I am exceedingly anxious to get tidings of Brother George."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"There is every sign of truthfulness about Miss Barton," I remarked on our way back to military headquarters.

"Miss Barton is the innocent instrument in a villainous, murderous plot," said Bostwick warmly. "That scoundrelly brother of hers is without heart or conscience. It was a cowardly, contemptible trick to avail himself of the resemblance of his sister's handwriting to that of Mrs. Chadwick. The only redeeming feature in the black-hearted scheme was that he did not invent an excuse for his sister to sign 'Chadwick' instead of Barton. But he felt himself safe with the body of the note in her hand. The application of a chemical speedily destroyed the original signature and gave him the opportunity to forge the 'Chadwick' and send the poisonous missive on its deadly errand. I have no doubt now that Bogardus counterfeited that letter of Chadwick to his wife. How else could he have had it in his possession?"

"That seems plausible enough," said I, "and it also proves Mrs. Chadwick's guilty connection with him. She must have given him the letter to copy, and she could not have been ignorant of the damnable use to which he in-

tended to put it. Sharp was right in his conclusions. I'd better wire him that we have another link in the chain of damaging evidence."

"You'd better do nothing of the sort," was Bostwick's almost savage rejoinder. "Leave him alone with the widow."

"But the widow is on her road here now," I protested.

"Yes," said he significantly, "but there is another. Excuse my bluntness, Mortimer, but I haven't much confidence in your detective. You seem insensible of the fact that he is playing you. He gave you instructions which, had you followed them, would have placed you in a terrible fix. And perhaps you did not notice the significance of the reply to Miss Barton's note—that Mr. Mortimer would call in person upon her. When he wrote that, or caused it to be written by Mme. Dupierre, he believed that Bogardus was 'Helen Barton.' You better give Sharp a wide berth; at any rate, keep him in blissful ignorance of developments hereabouts."

"Why, Bostwick" I said in astonishment, "you don't think that he means any harm to me?"

"My dear fellow," was his response, "it's folly to expect honesty or fair dealing from a rival."

"A rival?"

"Yes; from what you have told me I firmly believe that this man Sharp is laying siege to the susceptible heart of your good-looking landlady."

I laughed heartily at this odd conclusion. How could the detective be a rival of mine? I had nipped the French-

woman's pretensions in the bud, and certainly had no wish now to enter the lists for her love. Sharp was welcome to woo and win her, so far as I was concerned.

"You may laugh as much as you please," continued Bostwick, regarding me with an eye of pity, "but I know your temperament, and I tell you Mme. Dupierre would have married you but for the appearance of cunning Simon."

Somehow or other this iteration of my danger affected me strangely. I no longer laughed, but felt a dumb kind of pain in my bosom. It could not possibly be that I was infatuated with Mme. Dupierre unknown to myself, and yet I had read of such things in novels. Many and many a time the heroine has scornfully rejected the hero to find the very next moment that she could not live without him. And if love affects heroines in that contrary fashion, why not heroes? And if heroes, why not an ordinary, every-day business man?

I pulled myself off this line of thought with a start, and somewhat stupidly asked Bostwick what should be our next move.

"It is my opinion," he said "that we will find Bogardus at Arcadia, either on Warmoth's farm waiting for Mrs. Chadwick to appear, or with friends in the village. There is nothing more to be done for the present. We must push on to Arcadia. I am glad you have the pistols now, Mortimer. We must be ready for that infernal rascal and show no mercy, although I should like to get a confession from him first, and I do not relish the idea of making additional sorrow for that sweet little schoolma'am."

The last words came so tenderly from Bostwick's lips that I looked at him in surprise. Beyond what poets call a "far-off" expression in his eyes my friend was outwardly the same hardheaded, practical man of the world I had always known. It was foolish to suppose that he had been suddenly smitten by Miss Barton's charms, but I could not resist the opportunity to chaff him on the subject.

"You seem to be vastly interested in Miss Barton," I said, slyly.

"I am," was his laconic reply.

"It will be too bad if you lose your heart in this desolate part of the globe."

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, impatiently, "a man may be interested in a woman without falling in love."

"I don't know about that. My experience is that a man is in danger just as soon as he becomes interested in a woman."

"And my experience, Mortimer, is that your experience in such matters is not worth considering."

He spoke so testily, and withal so truthfully, that I did not care to continue the colloquy.

There was great excitement around military headquarters when we returned. The leading civilians were indignant that the governor should ignore their request for more troops and a bolder commander in chief. General Williams had received orders to concentrate at Arcadia, and the brave militiamen were getting ready for the march. A lawyer protested against Badmansville being left at the mercy of the lawless marauders, who, he said, were just

waiting for the troops to leave to rush in and murder every man, woman and child in the town. General Williams was somewhat impressed by the excited talk of this gentleman, and he consented to defer his departure until another attempt could be made to reach the governor's ear.

The obliging commander in chief speedily received a dispatch to the effect that there was no occasion to tarry longer in Badmansville. Hot reports were coming from Arcadia, where it was desirable the forces should join at once and stamp out the insurrectionary spirit of the armed mobs. The governor's secretary, who was evidently alive to the farcical nature of the entire business, added a postcript to one of the messages, saying:

"Please don't get killed. It would be difficult to keep your graves green this cold weather."

For a time after the receipt of the last orders it looked as though the citizens of Badmansville would oppose the departure of the militia by force. They gathered together at a commanding point and were seen to examine their rifles and ammunition belts carefully. Some of the hotheads had sneered at the youthful bearing of the troops, calling them beardless counter-jumpers, whom it would be fine sport to vanquish, and the lads themselves, who had borne themselves like veterans in a trying situation, would not have objected to a brush with their revilers whose homes they had been detailed to defend. But a few words from General Williams soon brought the excited citizens to their senses. They bowed to the authority of the State and sullenly watched the preparations for departure.

After dinner the bugle rang out and the men "fell in." Bostwick and myself had decided to accompany General Williams, hiring two horses for the purpose. The line of march, we were given to understand, passed close to the Warmoth farm, where we intended to leave the company and proceed with our investigation. Just as the command "Forward! March!" was given a crowd of persons was observed coming over a sand hill 300 yards in front of the column. They were flourishing guns and making a great outcry and we could see that two men were struggling in their midst.

As General Williams did not know whether they were friends or foes the word "Halt!" was given and the soldiers deployed and brought their rifles to the "present." No sooner did the crowd witness this demonstration than a white handkerchief was waved and voices cried:

"Friends with prisoners!"

"Bring them in," yelled the lawyer and his colleagues, and the crowd came rushing toward us at breakneck speed. Bostwick and I were mounted on our steeds watching the antics of the mob. Neither of us was prepared for the astonishing revelation at hand. We were regarding the scene as a common incident of the campaign, but I almost fainted when I caught sight of the two struggling prisoners. One was a short, pudgy little man of 60, with a close-cropped gray beard and attired in the rough garb of the district.

The other was Paul Chadwick!

As I clung to my horse's mane to keep from falling I

glanced at Bostwick. He was staring at my old friend with astonished eyes and I could see his cheeks blanch under the shock. He turned, and guessing the query in my wondering face, whispered hoarsely:

"For God's sake, pull yourself together. Don't recognize him yet!"

But it was useless offering me advice at that moment. Acting on an overpowering impulse I jumped to the ground and rushed into the center of the crowd, crying:

"Paul! Paul!"

Two brawny fellows had Chadwick by the wrists, but they fell back before my impetuous dash. I grasped Paul's hands and looked into his bronzed face. Alas! I found no answering recognition there. His eyes were glazed and shifting, and he was trembling with excitement. He looked at me queerly a moment and said in a pained voice:

"I seem to know you, but you are mistaken. I am not Paul; I am George Barton and I am seeking my wife, Helen."

It was in vain that I pleaded with him to remember his old friend. He shook his head mournfully and protested against my interference. All he wanted, he cried piteously, was to be let alone so that he might find his dear wife, Helen. The sad truth darted keenly through my mind. Paul Chadwick was helplessly insane and his delusion was that he was George Barton, the divorced husband of his wife.

His fellow prisoner had watched the scene intently. He

was still surrounded by his captors, but they had relaxed their vigilance during my colloquy with Chadwick, and he forced himself to my side and said, with a meaning glance:

"Why don't you let the poor fellow alone? You only excite him by calling him out of his name. He is George Barton; lots of people know him."

The news that George Barton had been captured passed from mouth to mouth. Citizens came forward to identify the prisoner, but they shook their heads and remarked:

"If that is George Barton, he has changed wonderfully since he was here a few weeks ago."

There was a consultation between the leaders and General Williams as to what disposition should be made of the prisoners. They had been caught by friends of Badmansville skulking in a ravine three miles from town. Both were armed and, as neither gave a rational account of himself, they were taken as spies or active enemies. Some were in favor of lynching the captives on the spot as a warning to the Arcadians, but General Williams, to whom Bostwick had whispered a few words during the excitement, insisted that the men should be delivered up to him.

Again there was an ominous movement among the testy civilians. They drew apart from the military and seemed to be debating the chances of a struggle. Williams saw what was in the wind, and, rapidly forming his men in front of the crowd, said sternly:

"Gentlemen, there has been enough nonsense. These

men shall accompany me to Arcadia. It is impossible for them to get fair treatment here. They must be delivered to me instantly."

A sulky murmur arose from the mob, in whose midst the two prisoners were now bound. It looked as though they were about to risk an attack on the troops.

"Present arms!" cried General Williams, noting the threatened danger.

Up went the rifles of the brave militia boys. For a moment the crowd swayed doubtfully, and then the leaders stepped forward and said:

"General, the prisoners are yours. We deliver them under protest and we shall hold you to a strict account for their safe-keeping."

Chadwick and his companion were then handed over to a guard and the company again formed in marching order. Before the bugle sounded, however, Miss Barton was seen coming from her cottage on the right of the street. News had been conveyed to her that her brother was under arrest and in danger of being lynched. Bostwick took in this phase of the situation with his usual quickness. He dismounted and ran toward her, and I could see that his rapid explanation had a soothing effect upon the little schoolma'am. They walked up to the prisoners together, and I heard Bostwick say:

"This is the unfortunate man, Miss Barton. He certainly is not your brother, although he gives his name as George Barton."

"Poor fellow!" said Miss Barton, in a tone of deep

commiseration. "He is not my brother. I hope no harm will come to him."

"He is now in charge of the military," was Bostwick's reply, "and will be taken to Arcadia. Meantime let me assure you, Miss Barton, that I shall communicate with you at once should I get tidings of your brother."

"Oh! thank you, Mr. Bostwick," she said, as the call to march rang out once more, and, mounting our horses, we set our faces in the direction of Arcadia.

## CHAPTER XX.

### LIGHT BEGINS TO DAWN.

During the turmoil and confusion following the appearance of the captives I was in an indescribable state of mind. The discovery of Paul in this plight was a heartrending shock. In all my theorizing about the case the contingency of his being alive had never presented itself. I thoroughly believed that he was forever at rest in the little graveyard at Aurora.

I had come to Kansas to secure evidence against his murderers, and yet there was the poor fellow himself, with his wits woefully astray, marching between two soldiers and muttering in a pathetic way about his dear wife, Helen.

What was this terrible mystery we were about to solve? Whose corpse had we interred with the love and reverence meant for Chadwick? Why had Mrs. Chadwick blackened the character of her husband? She must have known that his dead body was not in the coffin which she refused to have opened. Why was she now returning to the spot where his identity was only half hidden by the delusion that he was George Barton?

And then the coroner's inquest. How came it that the

jury, after solemnly inquiring into the cause of Chadwick's death, decided that he had died from a pistol shot wound inflicted by some person unknown? Someone had undoubtedly been shot and killed. How else could there have been an inquest? And who was the victim whom Mrs. Chadwick pretended was her husband, whom she brought in a coffin to Illinois and calmly saw buried amid the tears and lamentations of the old father and mother of Paul Chadwick?

These and a hundred kindred queries buzzed through my brain as we rode across the broken country toward Arcadia. I tried to convey some of my thoughts to Bostwick; but he was gloomy and abstracted and shook his head in token of despair as I hinted at explanatory theories. A little while before he was action and promptitude personified. Now he seemed powerless and inert and anxious to avoid discussion.

Left therefore to my own resources when most I needed friendly counsel, I asked permission of General Williams to interview the prisoners. He readily granted this privilege and I dropped back to see if I could make any impression on Paul.

I had a better chance to observe him now. He was dressed in a shabby suit of home-spun and wore a woolen shirt without a necktie and a black slouch hat, which was pushed up in front, allowing the hair to straggle over his forehead. There was a scraggy beard on his face, which, as already stated, was bronzed from exposure. His features twitched oddly and I noticed a scar on the right

temple, a slight indenture, evidently caused by some blunt instrument.

Thinking to humor him, I called him George. The name brought a sweet, sad smile to his lips and he said:

"Ah, you know me, now. I thought we were friends. And you will help me to find Helen, won't you?"

"Yes, I most assuredly will," was my response. "But tell me, when did she go away?"

He put a hand to his forehead, as though to stimulate his memory, and answered slowly:

"I don't exactly remember now. My head is paining me, and sometimes I do not think as clearly as I used to do. But you will help me to find Helen. She may be in France, she may be in Chicago, but we will go and find her."

I saw it was useless trying to get a hint of the past from Paul. His poor, wandering brain held but one idea—that he must search for and find his wife. It pained me beyond expression to think of the ruin and desolation that woman had wrought in the life of Paul Chadwick. Yet, amid the wreck of his intellect, she was the one tie that bound him to earth.

Paul's fellow prisoner seemed deeply interested in my efforts at conversation with him. When he saw me give up the task with a sigh he obtained permission from his guard to speak to me in private.

"It's no use worrying that poor fellow," he said in a choking voice. "He is past the touch of reason. May I ask if you really recognize him, sir, or whether you are

deceived by some fancied resemblance he bears to someone you know?"

Something in the prisoner's manner made me cautious. Perhaps he was responsible for Paul's condition, or perhaps the poor fellow had been left in his care, and he was timorous as to the issue of the scrape in which they were found. Therefore I said:

"May I ask your name, my friend?"

"Certainly. It is Michael Warmoth."

"Michael Warmoth!" exclaimed I in amazement. "Then you are the father of Helen Chadwick, this man's wife."

"Yes," he answered, with a start of surprise. "You do know him, then? What else do you know?"

This last question was asked with a savage inflection that caused me to glance back at the guards, who nodded as an assurance that they were alert. Warmoth's face was a curious study. In repose it bespoke a rugged and honest character. Now it was convulsed with symptoms of fear and fury. The man evidently held the key to the Chadwick mystery and was alarmed lest it be seized and used to his injury.

"I know that a grievous wrong has been committed by someone," said I, in answer to his question, "and I am determined to probe the affair to the bottom. That is my mission in Kansas."

"And your name?" he queried in the same rough tone. "How do my family affairs concern you?"

"My name is Robert Mortimer," I answered calmly, "and Paul Chadwick is my old and dear friend. I am here in his interest."

"Mortimer," he said, with a change of voice; "I have heard my daughter speak of you. It seems to me that you were never very friendly to her."

"That is neither here nor there, but I am afraid you have been misinformed. I was never unfriendly toward your daughter until, until——"

"Until what?" he broke in.

"Until circumstances surrounded the supposed suicide with a veil of deep mystery."

"In other words, you suspected Helen of having a hand in the death of her husband."

There was no anger in his voice now; the man spoke quietly, as though this conclusion was a natural one.

"To be plain with you, Mr. Warmoth," said I, "I did."

"I cannot say that I blame you," he continued, sadly. "Circumstances may have seemed against her, but, thank God! she has not that crime to answer for. She has been wayward and wrong-headed, but Helen is right at the core. She has been through the fiery furnace, poor girl, and has come out pure metal. Why, she is on her way to Arcadia now to devote her life to that poor creature" (indicating Chadwick), "who I am afraid will never see the light of reason again."

Warmoth seemed to regard his daughter in the role of a martyr. To one unacquainted with Paul's history he would have conveyed the idea that Chadwick was himself to blame for his present pitiable condition. I could not accept such a theory, even by inference, and I remarked that it was strange, to say the least, that news of

Paul's death should be sent out to the world, and that his alleged body should be followed to the grave by his sorrowing parents and friends, when he was alive and physically well in Kansas.

The position I assumed did not anger Warmoth, as I half expected it would.

"What you say is all very true, Mr. Mortimer," was his quiet response, "but there were circumstances which rendered the course necessary. We did everything for the best. Helen wanted to screen her husband from the consequences of his crime, and I and the rest of my family felt bound to aid her in this awful crisis of her life!"

"Crime!" I echoed, in amazement; "why, what crime had Paul Chadwick committed?"

"Murder!" was the solemn reply.

The answer startled me. I glanced at Chadwick. He was marching along with head erect and his old easy, springing gait. He looked more like my friend of five years ago than he had been since his fatal marriage. The glazed, dazed aspect of his eyes was all there was to denote the awful malady that had wrecked his brain. With the memory of his past manhood before me, his uniform gentleness and chivalry, his true courage and hatred of wrong, my mind instinctively rebelled at Warmoth's grave charge.

"Paul Chadwick is no murderer," I said, sternly. "I advise you to be careful how you apply such a term to him."

The farmer's eyes flashed and I saw that he had to struggle to keep his temper. It was but natural, I argued

to myself, that he should take the side of his daughter, and I felt pity for him as he compelled himself to respond calmly:

"It may be hard for you to believe me, Mr. Mortimer, but Paul Chadwick killed a man under circumstances which would justify the charge of murder in any court."

"Whom did he kill?" I asked, anxiously, now somewhat impressed with the earnest tone of Warmoth.

"George Barton, or George Bogardus, as he latterly styled himself."

I breathed freely again. Light was breaking through the gloom. The old farmer might regard the removal of that scoundrel as murder, but anyone cognizant of the prior provocation would call it justifiable homicide.

"Where did this killing take place?" I inquired.

"At my house."

"And the inquest was held on the body of Bogardus under the name of Paul Chadwick?"

"Yes. Nobody knew that Barton was there and few persons had seen my son-in-law. Therefore, to save Chadwick and keep scandal from the hearthstone we gave the dead man his name. It was Helen who suggested this. She was heart-broken lest her husband should fall into the hands of the law and suffer the penalty of his crime. As we have not many friends and live rather a secluded life, it was easy to carry out the plan. We concealed Chadwick until the inquest was over and my daughter went with the corpse to Illinois."

I could not doubt the old man's honesty or sincerity,

but I knew there were springs in his daughter's conduct that were hidden to him. But it would be cruel to apply to Warmoth for evidence against her, so I turned the conversation in another direction.

"How comes Chadwick in this condition?" I queried.

"It was the result of his wound."

"Was he shot?"

"Yes; but let me tell you the facts, Mr. Mortimer. When Colonel Chadwick came out here to make friends with his wife again this Barton, or Bogardus, was in the neighborhood. I think he must have seen him at the depot at Badmansville as he came through. At any rate he was much disturbed about the man's proximity, as well as about his wife's untimely trip to Chicago. He talked quite angrily about Bogardus and swore several times that he would kill the fellow if he crossed his path again. He was quieter when Helen returned, and it looked as if there was going to be a glorious reconciliation. Helen had confided some part of her troubles to her mother, and she was anxious to follow my wife's advice to make up with her husband and be a good wife to him in the future. Suddenly Bogardus put in an appearance at the farm. I tried to get the fellow away without Chadwick seeing him, but he was obstinate and said he had important news for Helen. He insisted upon seeing her, and Bert, my son, at my request, got Chadwick out of the way so that he could have an interview. Chadwick seemed to suspect that something was going on. He hurried back to the house, and finding Bogardus in the sitting-room with Helen he

pulled a pistol, which he had been carrying ever since his arrival, and blazed away at Bogardus. He shot the man through the heart. but not until Bogardus, who was uncommonly quick with his gun, had wounded him in the temple, that place where you see the scar. The bullet did not penetrate the skull, strange to say, but glanced around the right side of his head, leaving a bad scalp injury. From the moment of receiving that wound Chadwick has been as mad as you see him now. He insists that he is George Barton, and is continually looking for his wife, Helen. Poor Helen is very much grieved by his affliction. She is hastening back to take care of him."

Now, this account left many important points uncovered, but I did not care to press them. In answer to other questions Warmoth said Paul armed himself this morning and started toward Badmansville with the idea that he would find his wife there. The old man tried in vain to persuade him to return and finally accompanied him to see that no harm ensued.

"The result you know, sir," he concluded. "We have not been engaged in this county seat war, and I think it is a shame that we should be detained as prisoners at the very time that Helen is hastening back to her husband."

"I'll see what can be done to liberate you," said I. "It is very necessary that this mysterious case should be fully cleared up."

We were now within a mile or so of Warmoth's farm. Any arrangement for the temporary freedom of the prisoners had to be made at once. I went forward to Bost-

wick, who was still riding moodly along, and gave him an outline of Warmoth's story. He expressed no surprise, but his response enlightened me as to his feelings.

"I guessed as much, old fellow," he said mournfully, "as soon as I saw Chadwick's condition. And I" (sighing heavily) "have to break the news of Barton's murder to his sweet little sister."

"Don't call it murder!" I cried, rather impatiently. "From Warmoth's own account it was a duel, and no jury would convict Paul even of manslaughter."

"Yes, but he killed the man," rejoined my friend wearily, "and women do not draw such nice distinctions."

After hearing a modified version of the story, General Williams consented to the prisoners stopping at the farm until they were needed in any court proceedings that might result from the county seat trouble.

"I shall have to leave a couple of the boys as a guard," he said, "so as to stop the mouths of those yawpers at Badmansville. I do not want to give them any opportunity of complaining about laxity of discipline or anything that may reflect upon the conduct of the militia in these perilous times. But I do not think you need be under any apprehension as to the ultimate fate of the prisoners. These disturbances usually end in smoke."

Accordingly, when the farmhouse was reached, our party detached itself from the command, which continued on its way to Arcadia.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### MRS. CHADWICK CLEARS UP THE MYSTERY.

An elderly woman came to the door in great alarm as we approached the house, which was a large two-story frame structure, whose only architectural adornment was a green-painted veranda facing the road. She was wringing her hands wildly and was on the verge of a hysterical collapse when Warmoth ran forward, crying:

"Don't be scared, mother. These gentlemen are friends, and the soldiers are here to protect us from any attack of the rioters."

This assurance calmed Mrs. Warmoth instantly, and she led the way into a commodious sitting-room and bustled about attending to our comfort. She was a motherly little woman, with deep lines of care round her mouth and a patient, rather sorrowful expression in her dark eyes. She was very gentle in her demeanor toward Paul, who, apparently tired out with the fatigue of the march, allowed himself to be conducted to a bedroom, and was soon wrapped in a peaceful slumber.

After making arrangements for our stay over night—the militiamen having to be accommodated in a summer kitchen, where a large stove was set agoing for their

especial benefit—Mrs. Warmoth told her husband that their son had gone to Arcadia to await Helen's arrival, and would bring her home shortly after dark.

Very little was said concerning Chadwick. Mrs. Warmoth was inclined to enter into details of the tragedy, prefacing the story with some pathetic observations on the trials of her daughter, but the old man cut her short, saying:

"Wait until Helen comes, Mary. She will make everything clear and straight. She will convince these gentlemen that our sole object in this lamentable affair has been to spare Chadwick trouble. Poor fellow, it's all one to him now, whether he is regarded as dead or alive. To my thinking he'd better be dead."

Neither Bostwick nor myself cared about discussing the matter further until the arrival of Mrs. Chadwick, who alone could clear up, if it were possible, certain dark and ambiguous points in her father's narrative. Dusk was gathering now and we would not have long to wait for the promised elucidation of the mystery.

Meantime we heard and saw enough to convince us that the waywardness of their daughter had been the one great sorrow of the household. Michael Warmoth came of a good eastern family and he was better educated than the general run of farmers. We gathered that he had been fairly well to do, but that the financial aid freely rendered Helen in periods of distress had comewhat crippled him. But Warmoth was a sturdy fellow notwithstanding his 60 years, and there was not a hint of discouragement from

either himself or wife. Their sole wish, besides clearing off the mortgage, was to shield their daughter and her unfortunate husband from further harm.

About seven o'clock the sound of wheels was heard in the farmyard, and Michael Warmoth and his wife sprang up, crying:

"Here she is!"

Bostwick and I remained in the sitting-room while the elderly couple went to welcome their daughter. There was a hearty greeting and hurried whispers and then Mrs. Chadwick followed her parents into the room. She was very pale, notwithstanding the drive in the frosty air, and we could see that she was greatly agitated. She stopped short as we rose and, turning to her mother, cried excitedly:

"Have they come for Paul? Is he safe?"

Mrs. Warmoth replied that Chadwick was sound asleep upstairs and the gentlemen were present as his friends.

"Friends!" she cried, facing us with a wild expression in her eyes. "Friends! What proof have I of that? Did they not believe he was dead and are they not here to get evidence to use against me?"

The old man, who was watching his daughter anxiously, led her to a seat and as he motioned us to sit down, said to her:

"Don't be alarmed, Helen. You are at home and no harm can befall either Paul or yourself. Besides, these gentlemen only want to know the truth, which cannot hurt us."

"The truth!" she exclaimed. "Yes, I suppose they want to know the truth now. Well, I am ready to tell the truth. It is no use to play hide and seek any longer. Now, gentlemen, I am ready for your questions."

She had managed to steady herself and looked us full in the face as she uttered the last sentence. Meantime Albert, her brother, a fine, well-built fellow of twenty-five, had come in and taken a place beside his mother. Mrs. Warmoth was visibly excited and she seemed to find relief in holding her boy's hands.

An awkward pause ensued, during which I tried to decide how to proceed, but Bostwick broke the silence with a return of his old manner by saying quietly:

"You must know, Mrs. Chadwick, that our visit to Kansas was to clear up certain matters connected with the supposed suicide of Colonel Chadwick. We were greatly surprised and shocked to find him alive and in a pitiable condition. Mr. Warmoth has given us an account of the tragedy, which is far from being complete in some respects, and we would like to hear the full story from your lips—the incidents connected with the shooting, the mailing of forged letters to puzzle Chadwick's friends, the reason for the cruel stories circulated concerning your husband, and so forth. We ask this information as friends of Colonel Chadwick, and, we trust, not as your enemy."

"I can indorse what Mr. Bostwick has said," I remarked. "We want only the truth, which, as Mr. Warmoth says, cannot possibly harm anyone of this household."

We could see that the woman was struggling with vary-

ing emotions. She cast a half-frightened look at her parents and then glanced timorously at myself and friend. Suddenly she bowed her face on her hands and wept. Her mother rushed to her side and soothed her with loving words, while Albert's face worked ominously, as he muttered something like a desire to make short work of the strangers. But a whisper from his father brought the young man to his senses and he lapsed into a quieter mood.

"Mother! Father!" cried Mrs. Chadwick, as she made a strong effort to control herself. "I have been a wicked woman. All my life I have thought of nobody but myself, and self-love has been my bitterest foe. I have a sad story to tell. I would rather you did not hear it. Let me tell it to these gentlemen alone."

"No, Helen," responded Warmoth in a shaking voice, "we will remain. You have done nothing that can shake our love. Mother and I can forgive anything, and it is better to ease your heart of its burden whatever it may be, than to let it grind and crush your life."

"Yes," said Mrs. Warmoth, as she rose and caressed the trembling woman, "tell us everything, Helen. It will help you to face the future."

Mrs. Chadwick held one of her mother's hands as she began in a tearful manner:

"Of my life before meeting Colonel Chadwick I need not speak, as you gentlemen, I believe, are acquainted with its history. I left my husband, George Barton, partly owing to his cruelty, and partly because of a mad desire

to better my station. I had grown weary of the shifts and subterfuges of a gambler's life. I longed for the luxury of riches. I wanted to feel myself free from the remotest dread of want, to revel in the delights of high society, and become a leader in the gay world of fashion. Many persons of title and fortune had whispered that I was destined for a brilliant career, but I closed my ears to their suggestions, and escaped from the fate that comes from yielding. I was vain and giddy at this time, but I preserved my honor in the face of many great temptations."

Here she paused and seemed to be gathering courage to continue her confession. She went on in the same low, mournful tones:

"Praise of my beauty had perhaps unseated my reason, however, as I soon found the bonds of alliance with George Barton irksome and galling. I determined to cast him off. I was persuaded that, once free, a rich marriage would be easy of accomplishment. I came back home here, and I am sorry to say that I led my family a sad life with my whims and tantrums and unshakable resolve to try the lottery of the world again in my own behalf. But it is little use dwelling on this stage of my career. I went to Chicago and formed the acquaintance of Colonel Chadwick. He fell in love with me, but, God pity me, I had no responsive affection for him. I maneuvered and schemed to bind him to me and succeeded. I married him for his money and position. I might have been happy with him, but George Barton dogged my footsteps, and, with mingled threats and entreaties, made me weak and

miserable again. He extorted money from me, threatening to reveal my past to the colonel unless I complied with his demands, and I fell largely under his influence again. My fickle nature found no content in my second marriage. I grew low-spirited and despondent. I longed for more excitement than was to be found under the protecting care of Colonel Chadwick, and I think, Mr. Mortimer, you know that I managed to get my own way. I lived apart from my husband most of the time. I could find the excitement which I deemed so necessary for my existence only in France, where the rules of life are not so strait-laced as they are in the United States.

"George Barton followed me there on both occasions. Perhaps I was to blame for this. I had permitted him to gain some ascendency over me again and he was coward enough to avail himself of my weakness and vanity. Finally we quarreled. He returned to this country to lay my shortcomings before Colonel Chadwick, who forced him to retract everything of a slanderous nature against me and sign a paper proving himself a liar and a scoundrel. A copy of that affidavit, Mr. Mortimer, was mailed in the letter Colonel Chadwick wrote to me the day after he procured it. The loving kindness with which my husband wrote struck deep into my heart. I saw at last the infinite love and tenderness of the man I had wronged. My wickedness stung me to the quick. Then and there I determined to turn over a new leaf, to uproot the selfishness and vanity in my nature, and, were a reconciliation possible, to devote my future to promoting

Colonel Chadwick's happiness. It was for this purpose that I returned home. Colonel Chadwick had been impressed by my letters of contrition, and he was waiting, I understood, for proof of my good faith to take me back to his heart again."

Here Mrs. Chadwick had a short spell of crying, during which her mother patted and stroked her head, as though she were a little child again, pouring out her troubles into a sympathizing ear.

"Fate was against me, however," she resumed. "George Barton traced me here. He wrote me from Topeka, where he was again practicing his profession as a gambler, that he had information that Colonel Chadwick was seeking to obtain a divorce from me. He asked me to go there and he would give me information that would enable me to fight the suit successfully. Strange to say, I was now as madly in love with my husband as I had been indifferent before, and I went to Topeka to hear what Mr. Barton had to tell. He was studiously polite at first and seemed solicitous about my welfare. I was misled into half confidence with him, and when he asked to see some of Colonel Chadwick's recent letters I produced a bundle, which contained the one written September 24, while I was in Paris, in which my husband spoke of my misconduct so tenderly and kindly. Barton asked permission to make a copy of that letter for probable use in bringing my husband to terms, he said, and I was foolish enough to permit him to do so, giving him a pad of Colonel Chadwick's office paper, which I had in my satchel, for the purpose.

"Very soon he began to make ardent love to me again, saying that I was a fool to remain faithful to a man who was now trying to cast me off and promising everything if I allowed the divorce proceedings to go on and remarried him. I repulsed him and told him flatly that I intended to be reconciled to Colonel Chadwick, and to prove by my future conduct that I was worthy of his esteem and affection. Barton flew into a passion and began to make savage threats. He said: 'You shall never again live with that man. I will kill him first. I will watch for him and shoot him.' It was with great difficulty that I could get away from him. He accompanied me to the railroad station and his last words were that unless I returned to him he would take steps to put Colonel Chadwick out of the way. I was greatly alarmed by Barton's demeanor. I knew him to be a desperate man, and, when I wrote to Colonel Chadwick prior to his coming here, I urged him to bring his pistol and a supply of cartridges, telling him that there was excellent shooting in this section, instead of warning him that he might need the weapon to defend his life.

"Now in some unaccountable manner the idea took possession of me that I should go to Chicago and look up what evidence Colonel Chadwick had against me in the divorce suit. The colonel had written very kindly and I had begun to hope that my repentance and promises of amendment had had a good effect. But Barton's statement in regard to the alleged divorce proceedings had unsettled me, and instead of going to work in a straight-

forward manner my old method of deception forced itself to my aid and I decided to arrive in Chicago the morning after Colonel Chadwick left for Arcadia and examine the contents of his office vault."

"Then," cried I, as that memorable interview in the office came back to me, "you did know that Colonel Chadwick was on his way to Kansas that morning."

"Yes, sir," she replied wearily. "I was wild with the thought that I might lose him forever, and I said and did things that were untrue and improper. I wished to make you doubt the honor and manliness of your friend, Mr. Mortimer, and I acted as only a woman can act who is crazed with the prospect of losing the man she loves truly and devotedly."

I could see Bostwick elevate his eyebrows in amazement as she made this peculiar explanation, and, as for myself, I was not satisfied with the glib manner in which she was describing both her newborn love and odd conduct.

"After I had aroused your anger and smoothed it down again, Mr. Mortimer," she went on, with the faint flicker of a smile on her lips, "I ransacked the vault. I found nothing that bore upon any divorce proceedings against myself, but its absence did not compose my ruffled mind. 'Perhaps,' I argued, 'I shall hear of the suit when I meet the colonel at home; perhaps he will cast me off forever when I return,' and as I examined the papers in the vault I was seized with a sudden impulse to take everything that seemed to be valuable, and I made up a parcel and put it in my satchel."

"It was you, then," broke in Bostwick sternly, "who removed the missing securities?"

"Yes," she responded quickly. "I have them here in this very house."

Mr. and Mrs. Warmoth and Albert started in surprise at this confession, but not a word was uttered.

"I am making a full and free confession," the woman continued, as though aware of the sensation she was causing. "I want to conceal nothing. I do not know what I should have done had Colonel Chadwick rejected my proposals for reconciliation. Some very harsh means of keeping him to myself were passing through my mind. I think I took the securities with a view to carrying some of them into effect. Well, I returned here, and found my husband, who had at first been annoyed by my absence, kind and chivalrous. He was more than glad to take me back, but he was violently jealous of George Barton, whom he had seen at the depot at Badmansville on coming through and whom he swore he would kill should he again cross his path. We were so happy and hopeful again, when that man came here and demanded an interview with me. My husband was gotten out of the way, and Barton was admitted. He was incensed when I told him that I was fully reconciled to Colonel Chadwick, and he was using some harsh words when my husband suddenly returned. There was no parley between them. Paul, who had been practicing with his pistol that morning, at once pulled the weapon and fired at Barton, who returned the shot as he sank on the floor with a bullet in his heart.

Colonel Chadwick was wounded in the temple, and has been insane ever since.

"Of course, my parents were frantic over the occurrence. They had heard my husband threaten to take the life of George Barton, and we were all afraid that Paul would be arrested and tried for murder. Then I set my wits to work. I did not want to lose Paul again, sane or insane. It was my duty to care for him and protect him. It was I, therefore, who invented the story of his suicide. It was I who had Barton's corpse coffined and conveyed to Aurora as the body of Colonel Chadwick. What else could have been done? In the excitement of the time it was the only feasible plan that suggested itself for the protection of my poor husband."

"But was it necessary," I demanded, "to degrade the good name of Paul Chadwick? Why did you invent those awful stories of his cruelty, his madness and dishonesty?"

"No other course was left to me," she replied mournfully. "If the body was examined the fraud would be discovered at once, and Paul found and arrested. It was self-protection that guided me at this juncture. In saving Paul from prosecution I was sparing myself a load of trouble and unhappiness. I knew that if I threw mud enough his friends would hush up the pending inquiry. It was perhaps a cruel expedient, but it effected the desired end, and what mattered Paul's character when he was dead to the world?"

I listened to this explanation with amazement. The woman seemed honest and frank in the confession, but

what a terribly warped mind she revealed. And yet, when you came to consider her previous conduct, she had pursued a persistent course. Her nature was naturally twisted, and it was impossible for her to act otherwise.

"But that letter received by Mme. Dupierre the day before the killing," I said, "How do you explain that?"

"Simply enough, Mr. Mortimer," was her quiet reply. "Barton forged that letter when I met him in Topeka. He was an expert with the pen. He sent it to Chicago to make mischief in the event of anything happening to Paul. I believe he intended to kill Paul the day he insisted upon the interview with me and was himself killed."

"May I ask," said Bostwick, "why you applied for the insurance money when you knew that Colonel Chadwick was not dead?"

"Ah!" she sighed, "that was another of my impulsive actions. I had some sort of a notion that the application would assist the suicide theory, and I was astonished to learn that there was a clause in the policy stopping payment in the event of self-destruction. Besides, I thought we were entitled to the money, now that Paul was so cruelly afflicted and practically dead, and I should have taken it but for the fact that my acceptance of the company's proposal would have resulted in another investigation. I wanted to save Paul at any hazards and dropped the business only when I saw it was foolish and dangerous to insist upon a settlement."

"In the forged letter sent to Mme. Dupierre," I said,

"Colonel Chadwick appeared to hint that you had engaged in a plot to murder him. What was the meaning of that?"

"That depends in part," she replied slowly, "upon what statements Mr. Barton put in anonymous letters to Colonel Chadwick. I have been very wicked, Mr. Mortimer, but I never entered into a plot of that kind. Thank God! my soul has not that sin to answer for. I think I have told you all now, gentlemen, and I wish to go to Paul."

"Pardon me," said Bostwick, "but what are your plans for the future?"

"That hinges largely," she replied slowly, "upon what use you gentlemen intend to make of the facts now in your possession."

"I think Mr. Bostwick and myself," said I, looking at my friend earnestly, "will bury the whole story in our hearts while Paul Chadwick lives or continues in his present state."

"I have to make a trifling exception to that proposition," said Bostwick sadly. "It is my duty to tell Barton's sister that her brother is dead. That can be done, however, without reopening the case publicly."

"There is another matter that ought to be rectified," said I. "We should take the smirch of dishonesty from Chadwick's name by restoring the missing securities to their owners. That can be done quietly, with an explanation that need not reach the newspapers."

"I shall gladly give up everything," was Mrs. Chadwick's response, "so that Paul and I may now be left to ourselves in peace."

As she spoke a door from the stairs opened and Paul came into the room crying joyously:

"Helen! Helen! at last I have found you!"

His wife sprang forward and embraced him, calling him "George, dear George." They seated themselves on the lounge together and she answered a string of disjointed queries with the utmost patience and gentleness. There was a softer light in her eyes than I had ever seen before and her beautiful voice rang with the notes of pity and love. In spite of the gaps and discrepancies in her story, I believed that the woman had spoken truly when she announced her purpose to devote her future to poor Paul's welfare, but my heart pained me sorely when I thought how black and hopeless that future appeared.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### MME. DUPIERRE'S MEAN REVENGE.

Before retiring for the night we observed that Mr. and Mrs. Warmoth kissed their daughter tenderly and hoped that God would bless her efforts to do her duty by her afflicted husband. Albert also went up to her, and shook her hand with a warm expression of love and confidence. Poor Paul seemed pleased by their actions, and he drew the woman's head to his breast and lavished kisses on her lips while he murmured love phrases in the name of George Barton.

It was a heartrending scene, but it shed a ray of comfort on my thoughts, which were heavy and almost unbearable. It was an augury that the whole family was united in one purpose—to shield the erring daughter, whose confession they had just heard, and make the path before her as smooth as possible.

On reviewing the woman's remarkable story Bostwick and I agreed that, considering her devious ways of thought and action, she had followed the natural bent of her character. She was incapable of adopting any other course. With all her beauty and brightness of intellect there was a flaw in her moral nature that prevented any but the

faintest consideration of the rights and aspirations of others besides herself. She had not the excuse of the old poet, who confessed:

> I know the right, and approve it, too;
> Condemn the wrong, and yet the wrong pursue.

She seemed to be utterly unable to distinguish between right and wrong in certain lines of conduct.

It was a curious story she had told us, and it took us some time to make up our minds what had best be done. The woman was willing to give up the securities which Chadwick had been accused of stealing. Their restoration would clear his name of that vile spot. But was it advisable to attempt more than this? Could any good ensue from exposing the whole cheat from beginning to end? Might not some persons still charge that a crazy man was capable of anything and refuse him full exoneration from the terrible offenses against law and morals laid at his door?

We finally decided to let Mrs. Chadwick discharge her duty as she now saw it, unhampered by any disclosures on our part. But I insisted on the proviso that, unless circumstances imperatively demanded it, my pledge of secrecy should continue only while Paul lived or remained bereft of his senses.

In making this reservation I had in view the probability of his recovery, when I should have deemed it right and proper to re-establish his name and reputation in the community where he had been so cruelly slandered and reviled.

The family was satisfied with our promises in this regard. Mr. and Mrs. Warmoth blessed us fervently for our consideration, and Albert said he would never forget our kindness. As for Mrs. Chadwick, she smiled sadly, begged my pardon for vexing me during trying periods of the past, and vowed with all the eloquence of her wondrous eyes and voice that she would be true and loyal to Paul to the end.

There was nothing more for us to do after coming to this understanding. We stopped a day or two at the farm, and had the satisfaction of learning that the cruel war was ended, and that the militiamen detailed to guard Chadwick and Warmoth were ordered to free their prisoners and return to their counters in Hutchinson.

Bostwick rode over to Badmansville with a heavy heart to apprise Miss Barton of her brother's death. How he broke the news and soothed the schoolma'am I never knew, but he was in fine spirits when he returned and seemed more charmed than ever with "the sweet and sensible little woman," as he tenderly called her. His good opinion of Miss Barton increased with time, for six months after our Kansas excursion he made another flying trip to Badmansville and brought her back with him as his wife.

Mrs. Chadwick went to Kansas City with her husband, whose delusion proved as harmless as it was affecting. I often grew sick at heart as I mourned over his sad condition. It was cruel irony of fate that, amid the desolation of his mind, he should cling to this woman whom he had

wooed and wed with such dear aspirations, believing himself to be the man who had done so much to wreck his happiness, and whom he had killed to protect the good name of his wife. I never heard her call him George without a shudder. The name revived memories that dried up whatever milk of human kindness was in my breast.

But Paul, poor fellow, was happy in his way. The "dark backward and abysm of time" held no dread records for him. He was utterly dead to the past. His present, black and joyless as it appeared to me, was illumined with the grim belief that he was George Barton and that the woman who had tricked and betrayed Paul Chadwick was bound by the purest ties to his heart and soul.

I will give Mrs. Chadwick credit, however, for true womanliness at this period of her life. She kept her word, both in spirit and letter. For two years she was a loving and exemplary wife to Paul. Then he died, and Bostwick and I had the melancholy satisfaction of removing Barton's remains from the flower-covered grave at Aurora and placing poor Chadwick's body therein. We had to work secretly and took some risks in this grewsome exchange, but I felt better when I knew Paul was at last at rest where his loving parents thought they had buried him two years before.

Mrs. Chadwick sold off the millinery business that she had established to maintain herself and husband, on going to Kansas City, and went abroad after his death. She did not remain long a widow. Within six months she

became the Countess D'Aubigne, but the gayety of France, which she seemed to have essayed again, soon palled upon her. I learned from a newspaper paragraph a few months ago that she had renounced society and was devoting her time to charitable work among the slums of Paris.

As for Mme. Dupierre, events proved the unerring acumen of my friend, Bostwick, in affairs of the heart. When I returned from Kansas Simon Sharp was very curious to know what I had discovered. I paid his bill, but did not enlighten him, simply telling him we had no case against anyone. There was an odd expression on his face when he took the check, but I did not feel inquisitive enough to ask what it meant.

I had not been back in my old apartments more than three days before the secret was out. Mme. Dupierre seemed brimming over with happiness and on my complimenting her on the fact she said:

"Ah, yes, Mr. Mortimer. I am happy, very, very happy. I am going to be married next month."

That strange numb pain came into my heart again as I heard these words. What was this Frenchwoman's marriage to me? I ought to have been glad that I was out of her clutches, but somehow or other I did not feel elated. On the contrary I was depressed, for, despite her failings and propensity for matchmaking, she was, as I have never hesitated to admit, a pleasing and comforting woman.

Perhaps some of the misery that was spreading in my

breast was reflected in my face. At any rate, as I forced a few words of congratulation to my lips and asked the name of the happy man, she drew herself up proudly and said with a decided tinge of sarcasm:

"It is the man with the quick eye and the large brain, Mr. Mortimer. It is Mr. Sharp, the great detective."

"Sharp!" exclaimed I, "impossible!"

"Oh, no, Mr. Mortimer," she said. "It is not impossible. It will be the grand fact one month from now. Mr. Sharp he is great and good and smart. He tell me, 'Don't waste your sweetness on the desert air, dear Mme. Dupierre,' and when I smile he say again: 'Read the seventh chapter of St. Matthew at the sixth verse and take me for your husband.' And I read the sixth verse and say, 'Oh, oh, Mr. Mortimer should read this,' and then I say to Mr. Sharp, 'I will be your wife.' It was all very sweet and very simple, Mr. Mortimer, and we shall be happy forever and keep no more boarders. Au revoir, Mr. Mortimer, au revoir!"

I lost no time in finding the sixth verse of the seventh chapter of Matthew, but I shut the good book with a bang when I read it. The language seemed to have a meaning that was neither appropriate nor polite in view of all the circumstances of the case. It was Mme. Dupierre's mean revenge for my rejection of her suit.

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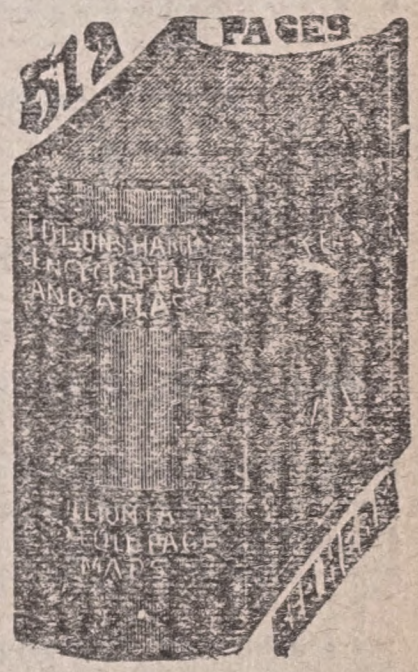


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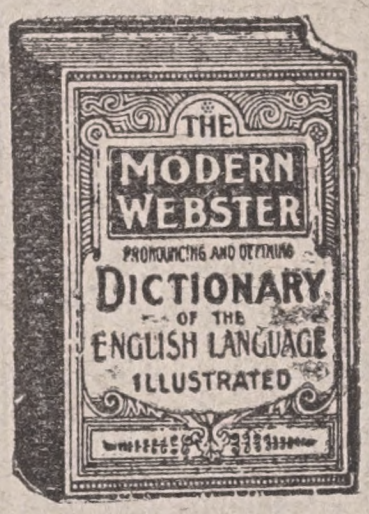


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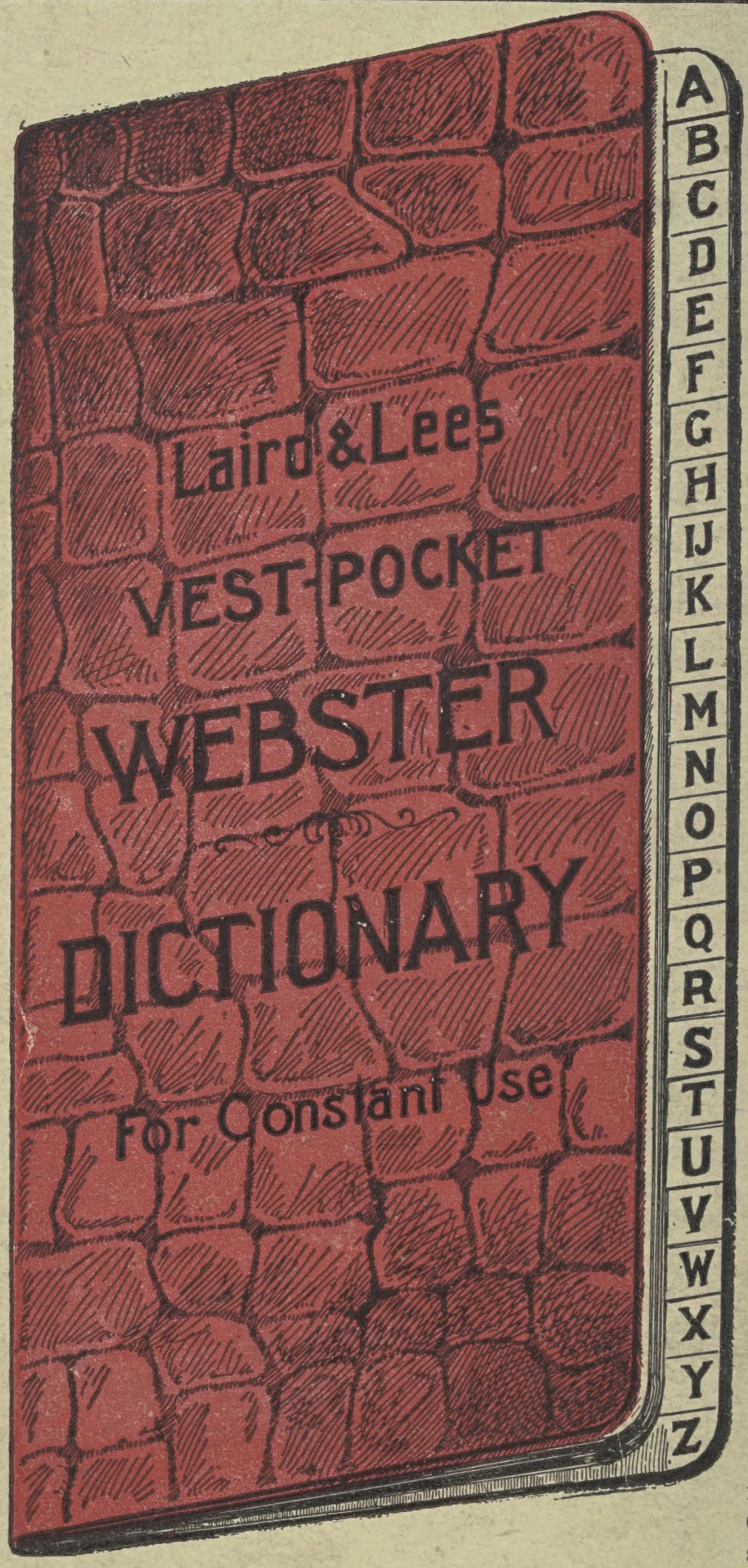


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